

魔術士オーフェンはぐれ旅

# 我が命にしたがえ機械

秋田禎信



富士見ファンタジア文庫

イラスト 草河遊也



「なんか、人に見られてる  
気がするんだけど」

「気のせいだよ。」

野生の獣かなにかじゃない？」

振り向きもせず、

マジクは鼻歌を再開した……



「いっわあーはいはいはいはいー」  
突如、響き渡る爆笑が、  
運河の中から巨大兵が出現した！







ドーチンが見上げる  
巨大な肖像画の下には、  
「シスター・イスターシバ」と  
刻まれていた――

# Prologue

It was dark, very dark. Except at the end of the stone corridors there was light, and an entrance was revealed. The walls were covered in a peat moss like substance, which sheened.

Several people could be heard in the room.....

“Hey.....what is it?”

“It looks like a.....doll.”

“Dozens, maybe even hundreds are here. It’s strange.....”

“Stephanie, can you read these words? It seems like an old saying.....”

“.....*They have accepted the mission, no matter — —*”

The girl read the text, while men behind her began to talk.

“Incredible. To think they’ve been down here for so

long...”

“Yeah, they’ve been hidden under the city. Until now...”

*“No matter how long it’s been, it will come to pass eventually — —”*

“However, once you are done with your findings...”

“Yes, we’ll move on once she’s finished. Anyway it sure beats staying in the city.”

*“No matter how long they wait, they’ll never forget the mission.”*

“I’m going to Totokanta...maybe someone from the Tower of Fang can help.....”

“Good one, you think the teachers can help?”

“Will you be quiet!? This line, *they have accepted the mission* — — it’s repeated over and over, like some kind of mantra.”

“I don’t care about that, I’m going to Totokanta.”

“Cut the chatter, help me get move this thing...”

\*

“They had no choice but to take on the mission — — this was made very clear.”

Sounds echoed throughout the cold hall. They all had feelings of despair, for they knew nothing of what the future would bring.

The hall was dark and wet. It was filled with the stench of moisture, which isn't suitable for storing bodies.

“I am unable to give you life, though it may be possible with stronger magic — —”

There was a hint of regret in the voice.

“It is a possibility, but my *ancestors* had no such talents. They have become powerless throughout the ages, we now lack the necessary strength.”

In the darkness, a green outline appeared around the robes. It was a soft and tender green.

“We may not have what you seek, but we can give you something else...”

That was followed with a short sigh.

“My abilities are limited. It won’t be long before I die. No one will come to my aid — — for they are long gone.”

Laughter rang out across the hall.

“This body has been down here for so long.”

“Why must we drench ourselves in this disgusting smell?”

Something swayed in the dark.

“Well if you can smell it, that just means you’re still alive. Now hurry, we haven’t got much time left.”

Then all their voices suddenly fell silent, as something crept out of the darkness.

One of them saw it, and shouted

“Ah! What the hell is that!?”

The shouting soon turned into screams.



“Get the hell away from me!

“It’s coming closer!”

Suddenly it stopped in its tracks, and stood there as if it was in a weakened state. Then it fell to the ground.

It slowly whispered.

*“We accepted the mission, accepted the mission...”*

“One day my master...”

Now the sound was coming from a completely different direction, even though the voices sounded the same.

# Chapter 1: Guardian of the hidden treasure

Summer on this continent is very short.

Most people don't even know this, nor would they probably care if they knew. Especially Majic...

But no matter what, everyone agrees that it's the best season of the year.

Majic was lying comfortably on a rock by the river, looking up in a daze.

He was humming.

"Majic, I said — —"

Across from where he was lying, in the direction of the river came a girl's voice.

"What are you humming all of a sudden?"

Majic stopped for a moment, and thought to himself.

“Nothing specific, I’m just humming.”

Then he started humming again.

Behind the rock lied Cleo, who was splashing water around the place. For some reason she liked to wash in broad daylight. Majic was on lookout, encase any perverts were around.

(What kind of person does she think she is?)

Majic rubbed his nose.

(She would always boss me around at school, she was so annoying. But now I’m a black sorcerer in training.) He thought to himself, cheerfully.

(Even though I’m a trainee, I’m still nowhere near getting the same level of respect as a knight would get. But then again, it still beats being a normal civilian. Though just because Cleo is from a merchant family, doesn’t mean I have be her lookout.) He then looked down at his clothes. It was a few days ago at a market that he got his new clothes, he modelled his new look after that of his



teacher. Black shirt, black trousers and a black cape. He actually wanted to carry a sword too but his teacher forbid it. (Does he want me to look like a child? I'm fourteen — — and I'll soon be fifteen, only another half a year to go. He must think that I can't even cut an apple with a knife, I'll show him.) Majic hummed a somewhat insidious tone, while scratching his blond hair. He then started thinking about Cleo, right now she was like something out of a painting. Her smooth pale skin enhanced her beautiful image, she was even cute when she was angry.

“Hey.”

The girl spoke. Majic was hiding behind the rock, he couldn't see her but he could imagine the wet body of Cleo talking to him.

“I can sense someone peeking.”

“You are imagining things. There is no one out here, besides the city is far away from here. I doubt anyone would come all the way out here just to see

you.”

“But — —”

She looked around. This seventeen year old girl was the youngest daughter of a businessman. Though her family did have some mixed heritage with ancient nobility, though this was lost on Cleo. Her slender figure basked in the light of the sun, as if she was a precious gem. Her hands were slender and lightweight, and moved like the wings of a bird. Undoubtedly she was from that of nobility.

As stated before, Majic couldn't see her. But then he leaned forward and talked to her.

“Maybe you are in a wild animal's drinking water.”

“What...?”

Cleo couldn't hear her properly since she was still splashing water about the place. Majic started humming again but — — Majic's eyes caught the sudden appearance of something moving towards him, but he saw it too late. It was already on him.

“Hey! ...”

No matter how much he struggled, he couldn't get it off him.

“Ah! Stop! Master!?”

“Oh I'm sorry, I just wanted to say hello.”

Majic looked up, it was his teacher. Both of them were wearing the same outfit, though Orphen's looked better on him. He is a genuine black sorcerer, who wears a dragon pendant, a symbol that the wearer belongs or rather belonged to the Tower of Fang.

“Why must you kick me in the head, master — —”

Majic asked, while Orphen held up his finger, as to signal something.

“Keep it down, or Cleo will notice.”

“Master, are you here to peak?”

“You little bastard, I'm not like you.”

Majic heard his words, and then both of them froze



for a moment.



“Wait a moment. I guess I could use magic to bend light, then we might be able to sneak a peek. The manta is sung by humming, so no one will notice anything.”

“Ah ha ha.”

A smile appeared on Majic’s face, Orphen then nodded a few times, and he pointed his finger to his forehead.

“So, I take it that you’ve done this before?”

“Be quiet, unless you want Cleo to find out!”

Orphen paused for a moment.

“Master?”

“Pay attention.”

Orphen said, but then he suddenly turned around and disappeared.

“.....Where did he go?”

Majic simply shrugged his shoulders and began humming again.



\*

(I can't believe that kid, didn't he know I was kidding.)

Orphen said as he stroked his chest, while quickly walking. He was heading towards the local carriage park.

(I'm impressed! It's been less than two weeks since I've started teaching him, and he's already able to use magic.) Under normal circumstances, you generally have to wait a couple of years or even a decade before you are allowed to use magic. But then again, not everyone gets trained at the *Tower of Fang*. Orphen has already taken on an apprentice, despite only being at the Tower for three years and four months. Where he quickly distinguished himself, gaining the praise of the high elders.

(Only two weeks?)

Though ultimately, Majic is still an apprentice so he is still in the early process of developing his powers. A sorcerer generally has three stages of development. The first stage is ability to perceive magic, sensing it and manipulating it freely. The second stage is the most important, as that is where you learn to focus and increase your magical power. This is when you are finally regarded as a sorcerer, and the *Tower of Fang* will give you a *dragon pendant*. Next is the third stage, after finally becoming a competent sorcerer you must dedicate yourself to research and study. As a sorcerer isn't judged by his strength alone.

(Though if he continues at his current pace, he might not become a real sorcerer by the end of the year.)

If that's the case — —

“Then, I might not get next year's tuition fee from Bagup.”

He whispered in a tone of despair.

\*

“I am Volcano Vulcan, the Masmaturian Bulldog!  
That black sorcerer will finally fear me when I crush  
him beneath my boot!”

He boasted to his brother, who was behind him.

“What about the Sword of Baltanders?”

Vulcan without even turning around, could tell his  
brother had a frown on his face.

Dortin was like this because he could tell there was  
someone behind him, a certain man wearing black  
robes.

“ .....

The bald man stared motionlessly at Vulcan, he  
didn't even have the slightest reaction. There was  
only silence — — or rather they couldn't read his  
reaction.

They were in one of the Alliance of Sorcerers bigger

branches, in a big metropolitan city. They were in the reception area, Vulcan held the sword of Baltanders in his hand. But the bald man sitting at the reception counter just sat there without the slightest facial expression.

Vulcan's heart began to sink, as he carefully muttered.

"I'm listening?"

"Well..."

The man responded.

Vulcan suddenly turned around and asked.

"Dortin, do you think this guy is retarded?"

"Quiet...he might hear you..."

He turned around, it was obvious that the guy wasn't listening. He just sat in a daze.

Vulcan took the opportunity to look around the place.

He saw two women facing each other, offering

prayers, which was engraved on a shield. It was hanging right behind the reception desk. It was the Alliance of Sorcerers crest, the Damsels' Orisons. Also known as Maiden's Prayer.

If you compared the Alenhatan branch to the Totokanta branch, this one doesn't even compare. Its size of is a fraction of the Totokanta branch, a waste of space frankly. The carpets are all damaged or worn, there are oil stains all over the walls — — in addition to tears, there is also half washed off graffiti, children's dirty fingerprints, and shoeprints on the ceiling. However that happened. There wasn't even any guards at the entrance — — that's how Vulcan and Dortin waltzed right into the Alliance of Sorcerers building. If there actually were guards they would have to fight them to get to the reception desk, since they generally don't allow non-magic users to enter.

Vulcan stared deeply into his brothers thick glasses. Dortin is one hundred and thirty centimetres tall, with a stubby frame. Both of them wore fur cloaks,

and from the hem of the cloak you could see their scabbards. He then took out another old sword and put it on the counter, boasting afterwards.

“Evil gangs of sorcerers — —”

“Right now, women are crying for help — —”

“The Earth cracks, and monsters appear — —”

Each time, he changed his words. Still, the man at the reception desk didn't react. He wiped his shirt with his glasses, and put them back on.

(I can't stand this place — — I told him we shouldn't have come here.)

Looking at the nearly two meter tall man, he continued to tower over them.

Vulcan was about to talk again but he saw a faint smile appear on the man's face. He was like a child seeking the favour of his parents.

“So you'll finally listen to me?”

“Ah.”



He barely uttered a sentence, then continued to stare into a void.

“ .....

Vulcan looked back.

“Dortin, he really is retarded.”

“He could have heard that.”

Dortin reminded his brother, since he believes that he did hear him.

“How could he, this guys is totally brain-dead.”

“We shouldn’t have come here to get cash for the Sword of Baltanders.”

“Are you blaming me?”

Vulcan rushed over and grabbed Dortin by the collar.

“Why didn’t you say this before?”

“I did! I told you the Alliance of Sorcerers wouldn’t take us seriously — —”

“Do you think this guy is taking us seriously!?”

Vulcan said as he pointed to the bewildered man behind them.

“But still...”

“Shut up! This is all your fault!”

“I can’t believe you...”

Vulcan let go of his brother’s collar, and looked again at the tall man.

“When people disagree, I think you should do something about it.”

“Huh?”

The man suddenly shot up, and leaned his body over the counter. He grabbed Vulcan from behind — — and pulled him off his feet, leaving him dangling in the air.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing!? Let me go or I’ll beat you to death with a tin bucket!”

“ ..... ”

He didn't respond.

Dortin just stood there motionless. Then he coughed and spoke.

“You...can let him go.”

Following his instructions, the man opened up his hand and let him go. Leaving Vulcan falling to the ground, hurting his butt in the process.

Vulcan groaned as he rubbed his backside. “When he said let me go, he meant gently!”

“Raise your hands.”

“Ah”

The man immediately put his hands behind his head.

Vulcan was surprised by this.

“Runny nose.”

He bent down close to their faces.

“Ah.”

The man lifted his index finger and inserted it deeply into his nostril, then he pulled it out. A giant outburst of blood then shoot out of his nose.

“Get a load of this guy.”

Vulcan was feeling strange, Dortin too. Both of them started at the bottom half of the man’s face, which was covered in blood.

“The staff here are so weird.”

They couldn’t waste any more time here, so they prepared to leave. Vulcan then proceeded to go down the nearest corridor, carrying the *Sword of Baltanders* with him. Shortly after, his brother rushed after him.

(Why do bad things always happen to me?)

He then started to think about home.

(I can’t even go back home since we ran away. Every day we move about with no roof over our heads. We’ve even got a loan shark on our tails, and to make it worse my brother beats me with that sword

of his. But I can't even go to the hospital if I get injured...) He thought he was saying this in his head, but in fact he was speaking out aloud.

"You idiot, I didn't run away — —"

He put his hand on his shoulder. "We're carrying this heavy sword about and we meet a fool at the reception counter, not even a welcome to be found. It seems these sorcerers are a bunch of fools, can't we just meet a sensible person for once."

Hearing him, Dortin went silent.

(.....I can't believe this guy is complaining about wanting to meet a sensible person."

If he heard him say that he would probably beat him half to death. Their brotherly bonds are merely a pretence.

Vulcan and Dortin come from the southern area, which is very cold. When they left home, it was the first time they had never set foot outside of their homeland. But when they did leave, they didn't

mean to sever ties with their family. (Though in actuality, Vulcan was forced from his home by his parents. He just abducted Dorian and took him with him.) Setting out into the open world, they couldn't even find a decent job. Mainly because humans regarded them as children, much to Vulcan's annoyance. Even since they've left their homeland they been living like vagabonds.

Back to the matter at hand, Vulcan could hear his brother muttering. But he simply ignored him.

"These humans simply despise us! Everywhere we go we are rejected, we can't find honest work and when we are on the road there are wild dogs everywhere."

Vulcan clenched his fist.

(Isn't it obvious?)

"We are simply being abused!"

Vulcan shouted as he clenched his fist, his voice echoing in the empty corridor.



He sighed, then looked around. Buckets and rags were everywhere, nothing else. He made up his mind about the Alliance of Sorcerers, they really were just a group of bored people.

(How can he say this when he hasn't even met much of them.)

It's now half past two — — long past nap time. The corridor went on forever, they didn't even see any other staff. They thought about how such a large organisation such as the Alliance of Sorcerers could have so little staff here, that just isn't like them. If there were any staff here, they wouldn't even let them in the building, never mind let them walk around.

But it's too quiet.

(It's like the whole place was deserted.)

Vulcans stopped walking, he was staring into an open door at his left hand side. Dortin watched his brother closely.

The sign on the door said “locker room”. He could see that there was another sign stuck to the back of it, it read “First year class C”. It seemed to be an old elementary school.

Dortin moved closer to the door to peek inside. He saw the naked upper body of a human female sorcerer sitting on a bench, she was hooking a bra to her breast. She stared blankly ahead, as if she was a stone statue.

“Excuse me...”

Dortin unconsciously said aloud.

“That pose seems very tiring...you should take it easy.”

“Okay...”

The female sorcerer said with a deadpan voice, then she lifted herself off the bench.

“Well.....it’s no big deal anyway.”

Vulcan’s faced wore a confused expression.

“People around here are out of tune. It’s like... they’ve all lost their souls.”

“Maybe it’s the weather.”

(If there was sand it would be just like the story of the King of Beasts)

*The eyes of those killed by a poisonous toxin* — — as the legend is written. One look could blow down giant trees or crush huge rocks. If this is true, then the world truly is a cruel place.

However, there is no deserts on this continent. If there were, then the King of Beasts would surely be found there.

In the many hundreds of years that this continent has been inhabited, such an incredible animal has never once appeared.

Though for the time being, let’s keep our thoughts positive.

“Ahahahaha!”

Vulcan and Dörtin screamed.

Both of them spring into action. Vulcan squatted on the ground with his sword pulled out, while Dortin looked for a way out.

“Let’s run for it!”

But they had no way of knowing the way back, because frankly they didn’t remember.

“Brother, which way do we go!?”

“How the hell am I supposed to know!?”

Vulcan shouted, but then he just realized something.

“I am the *Masmaturian Bulldog*! Vulcano Vulcan never shows his back to the enemy!”

“But, aren’t we are running away!”

“Shut up idiot!”

Vulcan tried to change the topic.

“Never mind, we need to get out of this place. Got any ideas?”

“Baloney!”

Vulcan's fist immediately impacted Dortin's face.

"Think before you speak, dumbass!"

Reeling from the impact, Dortin began to regain his composure.

"What about the King of Beasts?"

Upon hearing that, Vulcan became puzzled.

"Off all the things that we need, that isn't it!"

"Then what do we need?"

Their relationship was at a breaking point but for some reason, he pondered on these words.

"What are we sorely missing in our lives?"

Vulcan wore a puzzled look, but then his expression changed to that of anger.

"Money!"

(Yes, money.)

Dortin almost unconsciously said, but right now he wanted to get out of here.

“We could have traded in the Sword of Baltanders for money but we just had to meet that dummy, and a crazy lady!”

Dortin sighed.

“Yeah, but you stole that sword.”

“You’re wrong!”

Vulcan raised his voice. Dortin surprised, took a couple of steps back.

“How could you say such a thing?! I didn’t steal it, it was a simple transaction.”

Dortin wiped the sweat from his forehead.

“We are like treasure hunters, and we simply take as much as we can.”

(That’s still looting.)

“And for crying out loud, can’t you walk a bit faster?! We’ve got to get out of here encase the police arrive.”

This building was originally a school, Dortin could



tell that much. The construction of the school is rather simple, two three-storey buildings lined up against each other. The stairs in each building are located on the eastern side, and on the west side is the emergency escape ladders. Most of the corridors are straight lines, and there are six rooms on each floor. The first floor is relatively large, with a bunch of office rooms. That room is now used to stack old documents.

“Did you hear a scream just now?”

Dortin asked.

Carrying his brother, Dortin struggled to lift his brother up the stairs to the third floor. Where the research laboratories are held, if anything unusual happened in this place then that’s where they’ll find the answers.

On the third floor there was six rooms, the windows in rooms one to five were covered with thick curtains. None of them had any signs, except for the sixth door, which was opened slightly. Both of them

felt like this was a trap, and they were the rats.

(What the hell are we doing up here?)

Vulcan stepped toward the sixth room, moving rapidly across the corridor he approached the room. But the closer he got, the more he couldn't concentrate.

(What's happening? I can't think straight!)

Looking back at Dortin, he tried to retrace his steps. But eventually Vulcan lost the will, he desperately struggled to stay on his feet but simply couldn't fight anymore. Hitting the ground at full speed, Vulcan's face impacted hit the floor. His eyes now becoming just like the man at the reception desk.

"It hurt's..."

He moaned as he rubbed his nose, but then he heard a voice.

"Do not resist."

".....?"

He tried to lift his face.

At the door of the sixth research room, a man stood in the shadow. The man didn't even look human, his body looked so emaciated.

Vulcan had a bad feeling.

“.....A Doll?”

Vulcan said as he looked up from the floor, the man was obviously composed of inorganic material.

His skin was smooth and there were no visible signs of veins, he didn't breath either. Staring at his face or what could be consider his face, he saw an opening which was possibly his mouth. It had no body hair whatsoever, his height greater than the average human. The most remarkable thing about his garment is the red cloth on the man's right arm. Truth really does lie in the eye of the beholder.

“You...called me a *doll*.”

Vulcan began to fall asleep.

“I am a guardian of hidden treasure.”

“Guardian of hidden treasure ? ”

“Since ancient times, I have been the guardian of various treasures.”

Dortin couldn't turn away from this so called guardian.

“You are now under my control.”

He said as he walked towards him, but then he stopped in his tracks.

“Everyone here is affected by my magic.”

“Well, what about me?”

“It seems to be ineffective against you.”

“Why?”

“I don't know. There are some ways to nullify magic.”

“.....What ways?”

“Oh, I could think of a couple...”

He said as he extended his finger towards him, with

a ten centimeter needle coming out from his middle finger.





Dortin was shaking like a leaf, and the guardian paused for an instant. Retracing the blade from his middle finger, he then clenched his wrist. Pulling out a sharp wire, he then started to walk forward again.

“This might hurt a little bit.”

Dortin squealed as he stood in place.

But, the guardian stopped again.

“.....?”

Dortin looked puzzled, as he stared at the caped figure. He then looked down to the Sword of Baltanders, which lay beside his brother. It was too long to hang by his waist so it dragged off the ground whenever they carried it by their side, though they mostly carried it.

Dortin offered the sword to the guardian.

“A magical sword...these markings!”

“You can read it?”

Dortin whispered, then the guardian responded.

“Of course, this is what’s hindering my magic.”

“ .....

In the end, they couldn’t tell if they were lucky or unlucky. The corridor was filled with uneasiness as Dortin held the sword — — the guardian stared intensely at the Sword of Baltanders. The closer Dortin looked at his face, the more of his features he could see. His eyes were like glass, his hair was like that of a ratty mop and his mouth looked like it could cut diamonds. He was clearly thinking about something.

“This is the Sword of Baltanders.”

The guardian said as he tilted his head, meanwhile he stowed away the wire he pulled from his wrist.

“You don’t appear to be a sorcerer, why do you possess such an item?”

(I don’t really care that this guy isn’t human, I just want to know why he attacked the Alliance of

Sorcerers branch!) He didn't have the courage to say it out aloud. This really is a mysterious character, this is just an ordinary branch of the Alliance of Sorcerers — — not to mention that the staff they did meet were mentally deficient. And just what was the Guardian doing in the research laboratory — — but they didn't have time to think about that, unless they want to become just like that guy at the reception desk.

While Dortin brainstormed about a list of things he could say, he could only think of one. He put on a gentle smile and put out his hands.

“Why do I have it you ask?”

He then recalled the same thing he heard Vulcan say over and over.

“There is an evil man...the Black Sorcerer Orphen.”

He said with a slight smirk, while sweating incessantly.

(The most important thing is to convince him.)

Mother, today I became a liar — —

Lies after lies poured out of Doritn's mouth, he was doing the unthinkable. Then, a strange foreboding feeling hit him.

# Chapter 2: The beautiful Alenhatan

“The city of canals!”

“A city full of history!”

“The beautiful Alenhatan!”

Majic and Cleo held their hands together as they stared at an ugly shaped arch. Orphen with his eyes half open, began to speak.

“Can we go yet?”

“No!”

Cleo proudly put up a defence.

“Anyway, it’s not like you’ve got anything else to do.”

Majic also had the same expression on his face. Orphen sighed, and pointed to a long line in front of them.

“Can’t you see their busy? Thanks to all the tourists entering the city, we’ll have to wait in line to gain entry.”

“Ha-ha. Master, you look like a child who’s been forcibly taken out on a Sunday by his father.”

“Say that again, and you’re dead.”

Orphen said in a nasty tone to Majic, as he threw his hand luggage at him. Orphen stumbled to the ground, Orphen turned a blind eye.

Their carriage didn’t enter the city, it was parked outside the cities horse barn. Therefore, it was necessary for them to carry their luggage. It was particularly hard on Majic, since he had to carry Cleo’s luggage. He wasn’t having a good time, not to mention that he had to listen to Orphen’s sarcasm. Every now and again, he mumbled to himself.

“Anyway, look who’s here — —”

Cleo suddenly ran up to them. She recently changed her favourite dress, in favour for a plain t-shirt and

denim jeans. This suited her better, as a dress isn't great for doing menial tasks. These clothes were actually borrowed from Majic, and apparently they fit her just right. Majic thought that he was really clever, as he knew in advance that she would need a change of clothes.

"Don't you know that I enjoy travelling? I didn't tag along to just watch the scenery in the carriage."

"I don't consider this travelling."

Orphen sounded ungrateful.

"What was that?"

"Do you remember? I was in the money lending business."

It's illegal to do so without a license.

"I didn't gain government permission to earn interest on loans. Mainly because the tax rate on money lenders is ridiculously high, those who operate without a license face government prosecution."

“Well the government deserve what they’re due, it’s simply tax evasion.”

Cleo proudly stated.

Orphen snorted, and continued to talk.

“It’s not like I’m the bad guy here. I’m simply broke, I can’t pay their fees.”

Orphen had actually taken out a loan recently, to pay off another loan. If this continues, he’ll become just like those who he takes money from. Or fall prey to another loan shark.

“It seems you’ve been squandering Majic’s tuition fee.”

Cleo said, as if it was her money he was spending.

Orphen ran his fingers through his hair.

“Oh, would you rather take control of our finances? I’d like to see you try and feed our three mouths!”

Cleo secretly spat towards him, however Orphen didn’t notice.



“Well, maybe we should try and find some work.”

Holding Cleo’s largest bag, Majic stood up and said.

Orphen didn’t even bother holding back his sigh.

“I’ll think about it.”

In the end, they could only rely on one person.

“Wow!”

It took a while for them to wait in line, but when they got into the city their moods picked up. They were deliberately walking back and forth, just to admire the scenery. Being a major tourist city, the plaza in front of the entrance has been described as charming and diverse — — the pavement is a tile-paved mosaic pattern. Though it’s kind of hard to determine what it’s modelled after, but there is a distinctive geometric pattern. Beside the fountain there was a heart-like pattern, it was obviously carved out of rock. The fountain itself was a roaring lion about three metres tall, it was truly majestic. Looking at the water shooting out of the lion’s

mouth, one wonders where the water comes from.

Gathered in the central square was a wide variety of people — — residents walking, tourists, merchants, students and flower girls.

Cleo spun around, and exclaimed.

“Hey Orphen! Look!”

“What is it?”

Orphen turned around and gazed at the young girl beside the fountain. She was pointing at a bunch of meter tall pillars beside an Inn, where there was a statue of a man. He had one hand above his eyes as if he was surveying his surroundings.

“That one really is a fan favourite.”

Orphen was getting impatient at her looking at everything.

Cleo began to ask about other things.

“Well, what about the canal?” “Ah, yes. The city was formed along the canal, which runs right through

the city.”

Orphen then began to talk as if he was some kind of tourist guide.

“Alenhatan, the city of canals. It’s one of the largest cities on the Kiesaruhima continent, and half of the area is deserted ruins of the heavenly beings...”

“Is the city’s population greater than Totokanta?”

“Yes it is, but one third of the population are tourists.”

“I want to see the canal.”

Cleo asked. But Orphen shook his head.

“We can’t, we’ve got to find some accommodation first.”

“But —”

“Listen, you don’t know this city. I do, so I’ll be leading us about...”

“But still —”

Cleo looked at him with a frustrated look.

“How come you’re familiar with this city?”

“After I left the Tower of Fang, I ended up here.”

Behind Orphen, came a shout.

“Master!”

It was Majic. He is a skinny teenager who is carrying Orphen’s luggage, wobbling as he walked.

“What’s the matter?”

Orphen said, as Majic was struggling to get past the crowds with their luggage. When he did, he collapsed with the bags at Orphen and Cleo’s feet.

“It’s too much!”

“What?” “You gave all the bags to me! And it took me three times as long to get here!”

Majic was exhausted.

“Master, don’t you intend to take care of your student?”

“Nope.”

Orphen calmly answered.

“Master, you can’t do this to me! At least take one bag with you!”

Majic picked up the luggage and went after them. Orphen was buying flowers from a ten year old flower girl, the flowers were purple butterfly-shaped flowers. After paying the girl, Orphen then noticed that Majic had caught up to them.

“Oh, you came just in time.”

He placed the bouquet on top of the luggage Majic was holding.

“Master!”

Ignoring Majic’s objection, they moved onward. Cleo on the other hand was watching Orphen. She looked surprised, she never expected Orphen to buy flowers.

“.....What is it?”

Orphen asked. Cleo reached up and grabbed the bouquet off the luggage.

“.....Oh, I just didn’t expect you to buy flowers.”

“So, I can’t buy flowers every once in a while?”

“Every once in a while?”

“Yeah, for a certain someone.”

Listening to his words, Cleo was stunned for a moment.

“What, so these aren’t for me?!”



Orphen sighed.

“Why would you think they are for you?”

He said, as he snatched the bouquet from Cleo’s hands. She tried to get them back, but Orphen evaded her. She went straight into Majic, who was holding the luggage. He couldn’t see in front of himself to avoid her, so she collided into him and the bags went everywhere. A cackle of laughter could be heard in the air afterwards.

“Master!”

“My bags, they’re everywhere! My clothes and my personal belongings are everywhere!”

“It’s not my fault...”

Majic tried to defend himself, but Cleo just ignored him. She picked up her bags and placed them all back in his arms, before Majic could even open his mouth again.

Cleo turned around to Orphen and gave him a dirty look, then she asked him a question.



“Orphen, who are these flowers for?!”

“ .....

Orphen looked embarrassed as he tried to find an answer.

“You know, I did live here for three years...”

“What are you trying to saying?”

Orphen was getting sick of her questions, so he threw the flowers up into the air. They landed back into her Cleo’s arms.

“Here you go.”

Orphen didn’t even bother looking at her, but he could tell that she was angry.

“Humph!”

Cleo walked back to Majic and put the bouquet on top of the luggage. Not noticing, he tumbled backwards as he tried to balance the weight.

Alenhatan. The City of Water.

It’s one of the four major cities on the Kiesaruhima

continent. Hundreds of years before there was a king, this city was the capital of the ancients. A canal flows through the centre of the city, and numerous merchant ships traverse the city. The city is famous across the continent for its beautiful landscape. In the heart of the city there is a bunch of noble buildings from hundreds of years ago, they have since been turned into museums and libraries, both of which are open to the public.

The city gains most of its income from tourism. In fact, every year hundreds of thousands of tourists come to this historic capital. Due to the huge numbers of tourists, the local shops generally have high prices. The most prosperous shops are the souvenir shops, who make a lot of money off the gullible tourists.

“Is she okay, Master?”

Majic who was holding the luggage, calmly asked.

“What are you talking about?”

“Cleo. She seemed rather angry.”

He looked back.

Cleo was painting her distance from them, she was obviously angry.

“.....If this continues, it'll just get worse.”

“Should I send flowers? Maybe a card too.”

“I think that would have the opposite effect.”

Majic said glumly, Orphen just shrugged his shoulders.

“It's no big deal. Just forget about it.”

“You're being optimistic, master...”

Majic grumbled, Orphen meanwhile was looking around the streets — — he had gone down the road for twenty minutes. The hotel he checked out was mostly used by dock workers, ordinary travellers cannot rest there. According to Orphen's memory, there should be an Inn for travellers somewhere around here.

(I haven't been down this street, in a long time...)

Orphen said to himself, as he stretched his waist.

(I don't really want to go down this way.)

In fact, he didn't have many good memories on this street. He grew too accustomed to living in the Tower of Fang that even interacting with other's caused problems for him. He even fumbled at buying the right ingredients and foodstuffs for cooking, not to mention — — “.....Okay.”

Orphen finished talking. He seemed to take a deep gulp, as if he was swallowing something. This even came as a surprise to Majic.

“After we find an Inn. We'll go places.”

“.....Ah?”

Majic started to channel all his energy.

“I want to escape from this pile of luggage as soon as possible, any hotel will do.”

“Great, but first we've got to arrange your physical training that you'll do every day. We've got to awaken the power inside you.”

“.....Master, you don't seem too happy.”

It was true, anyone could see it on his face.

“If my memory is right, about one kilometre down that road there should be a lot cheap hotels. Take Cleo and go.”

“Me and Cleo?”

Majic said in a childish tone

“With Cleo in that state I'm not sure what she'll do, its suicide.”

Orphen was getting frustrated, but so was Majic.

“First it's training then its hotels. What about the Alliance of Sorcerers Alenhatan Branch?”

“What about it?”

“Well, can't we check it out?”

Majic asked curiously. Orphen held up his chin and began to speak.

“Let me explain something to you, when it comes to magic — — this region takes the opposite approach

to magical users.”

“The opposite...approach?”

Majic stopped in his tracks, as too many people were walking in front of him.

“Yes. The Alliance of Sorcerers are very strong — — they generally don’t let people without magical powers access to their buildings. Also, this city is far away from the King’s influence, even with his power he wouldn’t be able to control them. After all, that’s a lot of Sorcerers when you actually think about it.”

“So, not all branches are the same?”

“Exactly, and don’t forget that the *Alliance* is generally regarded as being a thorn in the country’s side.”

“What was that?!”

Majic began to panic, as Cleo’s voice rose up behind him. Seeing her coming, Orphen smiled and waved to her as she approached.

“Well, they haven’t been much of a problem recently.”

“Yeah...but you said they were a thorn in the country’s side.”

“The royal family, to be exact.”

Orphen said, as he held up his finger.

“The capital city of Meberensuto may be the biggest city and have the largest walls. But no matter how many armies they have, they are no match for the Alliance of Sorcerers. I’d be wary of them too if I were in their shoes, it’s basically a matter of who has the bigger stick.”

“Oh...”

“Also, it’s not like the Alliance and the government agreed on everything. Especially when the Alliance starts to bolster their ranks, something the crown takes very seriously.”

Majic swallowed as Orphen continued.

“Right now the Royal Knights are in charge of the

*Misty Waterfall*, which house white sorcerers. Only the King and a handful of his cronies know its location. Of course the King can also call upon the thirteen apostles, though don't let the name fool you. There are actually nearly one hundred black sorcerers in their group, those guys could raze an entire city overnight."

Orphen then held up two fingers.

"Next is the *Church*, their headquarters is in *Kimuraku*. Which is in the north of the Kiesaruhima continent, their teachings are widespread across the land. Their teachings strongly deal with occultism, and don't even try to understand others. In short, they hate us sorcerers without reason."

"Speaking about the Church. There was one back home. Cleo would..."

Speaking about Cleo, she was kicking some trash by the side of the road.

".....Throw rocks at their windows."



Orphen and Majic looked at Cleo.

“However, the Church holds no real power in Totokanta. They’re power is generally concentrated in the north of the continent. If you cherish life, head to the north and not to the Tower of Fang. If you do, they’ll send they’re assassination units after you. Everyone knows that...”

Hearing this, Majic tilted his head.

“So the Church can order people’s death? Why?”

“You find this strange? After all, they do worship the *Sisters of Fate*...”

“.....Why do you say that?”

Orphen smiled.

“When it comes to someone’s fate, death is usually included.”

Then he now held up three fingers. “And finally — — magic is the final cause of why no group has a stable foothold in this city.”

“So, is this third organisation regarded as a thorn too?”

“They are not an organisation. But a race...the dragon race.”

“Dragon?”

“Yes, since this city was an ancient capital. You know, their legends date way back before we humans existed on this continent.”

Majic frowned in confusion.

“I don’t understand. So dragons once lived in this city?”

“Exactly.”

A wry smile appeared on Orphen’s face.

“He he, you’re confused because you don’t understand what I mean by *dragon*.”

“.....?”

Majic just sat there in confusion, as if there was a question mark above his head.

“I guess you’re imagining just what kind of dragons they were. A big body, with scales all over, breathing fire. And don’t forget the look on the lizard king’s face as he sits upon his treasure…… Just like this one.”

While walking Orphen pulled out his dragon pendant underneath his shirt. Before entering the city, he had hidden his dragon pendant there.

“……So they’re the same?”

“Nope, they’re different. This dragon pendant is only a symbol of their power, as you can imagine they probably looked like large reptilian dinosaurs and they just spit fire. They aren’t interested in gold or silver, they’re just lizards.”

“……But the legend of the dragons——”

“Yes. The legend says that the dragons have excellent abilities, superior intelligence, and some of them could actually speak.”

“Is the legend credible?”

“Of course they are.”

Orphen then laughed mischievously.

“But that’s not to say that legends are sometimes distorted. Behold! A magical dragon that talks!”

Majic thought to himself for a moment.

“ .....

“Master, is the magic you use and the magic dragons use the same?”

“Well, magic and spells aren’t the same thing. Simply put, magic is what dragons use, and sorcery is the power of the gods. As for spells and incantations, that’s a story for another time.”

Majic rolled his eyes.

“They had all kinds of uncivilized beliefs in ancient times, back when we were mammals and the gods openly used magic.”

“ .....

Majic was beginning to understand, Orphen then

put the dragon pendant back under his shirt.

“Among the mammals, there are six races. Just take a look at that fountain in the square.”

“Oh. That strange long haired lion?”

“Yes, that is one of the six races, the red lion (Fairy Dragon). The wolf (Deep Dragon) and so on. They stole the secret rituals of the god’s magic, and made it their own. These six races are now collectively known as the Dragon, and they resided on this continent. In addition to the Heavenly Beings.”

“Heavenly being’s?”

“Yes, they used ancient magic. Kind of like a demigod with tremendous magical power. The legend was composed exclusively of women, though we don’t know this for certain. They are human beings that don’t look much different from the average human. Their eyes are bright green, just like that of the Dragon. Anyway the Heavenly Being’s had a good relationship with the humans.”

“.....So, how close was this relationship?”

Majic said, but Orphen didn't speak for a moment.

“Well, if you must know there were half-breeds.”

“.....Oh...”

“In fact, we humans that can use magic are a result of that. Which means that we or some of us are born from human and Dragon hybrids. Though that's not to say there aren't some genetic problems...”

“I see.”

Orphen's face looked troubled.

“Even though we are related by blood, there is a fundamental difference.”

“..... What is the difference?”

“For example, whether you are a white sorcerer or a black sorcerer you use your voice — — saying a certain magical incantation to cast magic. This is called voice magic, and its effects are only temporary. But — —”

Orphen put both hands on his hips.

“The Heavenly Being’s used writing as their magical medium — — because they didn’t use their voices, this is called silence magic. The text can be written on pretty much anything, you could even engrave it on metal and the effects would be permanent. Though when compared to voice magic, it’s more powerful and complex.”

“How powerful?”

It was a natural question, but Orphen looked very embarrassed.

“Well, I haven’t personally seen any silence magic in action. So it’s hard to say — — though I have seen the legacy they have left. From magical words engraved on rings, swords and the like. Just like that one that bastard stole from me. In short, it’s not something the ordinary person can handle. There have been many attempts but no one has succeeded thus far at putting them to good use.”

“ .....

Majic then spoke with honest eyes.

“Even so, that hasn’t stopped people from pursuing their power.”

“Well — —”

Orphen now wore a self-deprecating smile.

“I didn’t say someone that whose strong enough couldn’t do it, even if it may be a stupid thing to do.”

“ .....

Orphen was full of confidence when he said those words, Majic just couldn’t understand him, and he just blinked his eyes and shrugged.

“So, why can’t the Alliance of Sorcerers gain a stable foothold in this city again?”

“Whoops, guess I forgot about that part. To put it bluntly, the *Dragon Faith* is strong in this city. The *Dragon Faith* generally only exists around the border regions, but Alenhatan is an exception.”

“.....How come?”



Majic asked, and the answer was simple. Now there was less people on the streets, and they took a side street, leaving the tourist trail.

“Because people are afraid of the unknown. That’s why 100 years ago they hunted down sorcerers in this city. “

“How many people died?”

“.....Who knows?”

Orphen then lead the way to Alliance of Sorcerers Alenhatan branch. The street was full of tall buildings, since most of them were apartment buildings.

“It doesn’t look well maintained.”

Majic said, but Orphen just sighed.

“It’s used to be an abandoned elementary school, the school moved to a better location. Though the place has seen better days...” He then turned around and saw Cleo about ten metres behind them, she was obviously avoiding them.

Orphen then spoke impatiently.

“Hey you back there, why don’t you say hello!?”

Cleo ignored him and just flipped her golden hair.

“Just my luck, haven’t I apologized already?”

Cleo didn’t look happy, she then stomped the ground with her feet.

“You call tossing flowers at me an apology?!”

“Come on, what did I do wrong?”

She didn’t bother responding, she just stared at and started gnashing her teeth. Orphen let out a triumphant smile.

“.....Master, cut it out.”

“Anyway you’re acting like a total child, you are an adult so act like one.”

After listening to Majic, Orphen replied without even looking at her. Cleo’s face only become more contorted as she became angrier, she then lunged and punched him in the gut.

“It seems it had the opposite effect.”

Orphen murmured.

“As if that will solve the problem...”

Majic calmly said, then Orphen had no choice but to face the Alliance of Sorcerers building.

“We’ll sort our problems out later.”

Orphen said as he approached the building, he saw a playground built besides the building but oddly there was no movement, not even a stray cat.

Orphen couldn’t help but feel strange — —as there were no guards in sight.

“Isn’t there anyone in there?”

Majic said as he was staggered beside Orphen, still carrying the large bags.

“This place has some unfortunate memories for me...perhaps I shouldn’t have mentioned that”

“What do you mean?”

“It’s an old friend, but I’m not sure if she’s here. The

last time I saw her was in a hospital.”

“What makes you think she’s here?”

“She’s a sorcerer. If you want to survive in this city as a sorcerer, you’ve got to stick with family — — and that means the Alliance of Sorcerers.”

He stepped back a bit and looked at the playground once more, he saw Cleo standing at the playground’s entrance.

Orphen though about half-jokingly waving at her. She would probably throw rocks in anger, but luckily he was too far away.

He raised his right hand but — —

Suddenly he sensed a strange entity behind him, inside the Alliance of Sorcerers building.

“Whoa!”

Orphen could feel the hairs on the back of his neck stand up, as a foreboding feeling went over him.

Noticing this, Majic shouted.

“Master! What’s wrong!?”

He shot a glare back at him — —but before he could even open his mouth a huge whirlwind consumed the building. It was so strong that it even started pulling parts of the playground up into the air, meanwhile Orphen and his comrades hung on anything they could find. The playground was being destroyed and the Alliance of Sorcerers Alenhatan branch was crumbling before them. All they could do was hang on to something to save themselves, but even that wasn’t enough as the whirlwind wasn’t made of just air — —but energy!

(This is bad, I never expected this)

Orphen quickly covered his hand so he could save his breath for a magical incantation. Now — —the whirlwind started to expand and gain power as it threatened to engulf them, so much that small stones were starting to impact them. Orphen quickly began chanting the incantation.

“I spin thee — —”

— — Suddenly windows smashed, and pieces of glass hit him — —

“ — — Armour of light!”

Like oil being poured onto red-hot iron, a shining ring of light appeared around Orphen — — the shards of glass were destroyed by the barrier. At the same time, pieces of wood from a nearby billboard were being torn off. Even if it hit him, he would be protected.

With a hoarse voice Majic shouted towards Orphen.

“.....What now?”

“Let me think.”

Orphen said as he looked towards the playground, a once peaceful scene. Parts of the playground were being destroyed by the whirlwind, but luckily it had not reach Cleo yet. The girl just stood there stunned, with a pale face.

“Whoever’s doing this can’t keep it up for long, though I’m not sure if my shield will hold out.”

“And what if it fails, then what?”

Majic said with a trembling voice.

“I’ll think of something.”

But just as Orphen spoke, more parts of the playground were being flung into the air.

“Damn it!”

Orphen’s barrier had begun to fail, gaps were starting to appear in the barrier. He was helpless against the might of the whirlwind— —then suddenly he could feel his magical energy being sucked from his body, the feeling made his shudder.

Then he noticed something— —he couldn’t make it out, but there was someone standing at a window on the third floor.

(.....?)

It was a wondrous sight. Orphen was surrounded by clouds of dust, obscuring his vision. But he could make out that it was a man— —no, what seemed like a man.

(“What the...?”)

Orphen could see parts of it now, he couldn't believe his eyes. It had pale bluish skin, with no visible hair on its face. Its eyes looked like they were carved by a professional sculptor, but it oddly didn't have a nose. Then he caught a glimpse of its mouth, an open slit which looked like it was saying something. Orphen wasn't very good at lip reading so he couldn't tell what it was saying, all he knew was that it wasn't good.

Then he saw the silhouette lift it's unusually thin arms, its thin fingers gently holding an old large sword— —Orphen had a feeling of Deja vu.

(It's the Sword of Baltanders! Then— —does that mean Vulcan is in there?)

Suddenly his barrier was broken. Majic gave out a moaning cry of despair as wood chips flew at both of them, some of them striking Orphen in the forehead.

“ — — — — ! ”



Orphen felt like he was going to pass out, but he just pressed down on the wound and soldiered on.

“Damn him! That bastard— — what mess has he got himself into this time!”

Suddenly, the ferocity of the winds brought down a part of a wall. Then Orphen stuck out his right hand and shouted intensely, as part of the wall made its way toward him.

“Sword of Light, whom I do release!”

A bright flash of light destroyed the piece of the wall, as it exploded in the air. He chanted the same incantation again as he turned around the face iron bars which were torn from a nearby ladder.

Suddenly his right shoulder was impacted with a metal bolt, he then screamed as he fell to the ground. He felt a tingling sensation coming from his shoulder, he couldn't move it, and it seemed to be broken.

Orphen pressed down on his shoulder and groaned aloud.

“Oh shit...I think it’s broken.”

He usually says things like this without thinking.

“Master!”

Majic said, as he looked down at Orphen on the ground.

“Time is short, so listen up— —”

“I can’t take this! I don’t want to die here!”

Orphen thought about grabbing his apprentice and making a run for it— —but as he looked around in despair, he knew they’d only be flung up into the sky.

“Orphen!”

At the playground nearby, he could hear Cleo shouting something. Though it was impossible to hear her over the roaring tornado, nor could he see her clearly. The only thing he could make out was the white t-shirt that she was wearing, the suddenly — — A bright white light spread around the area, but it made no sound. Then followed multiple

tremors and shock waves as the building was hit with what could only be described as an internal tsunami. Orphen felt like his eardrums were going to burst. Meanwhile it seemed like the building was breaking down from intense heat, then it finally gave way and exploded...

Orphen just lay there, until he had enough strength to stand up. Then he saw frantic housewives scuttling about trying find their laundry, most of which was blown about due to the wind. Meanwhile Orphen struggled to make sense of what just happened.

“Ouch, the pain!”

Orphen said, as he could feel his body ache all over.

“Orphen!”

“My goodness!”

Orphen ignored their screams, Cleo then rushed over and hugged him.

“Are you alright? I hope nothing’s broken!”

“You’re hurting me!”

Orphen tried to shake Cleo off, knowing that she was oblivious to his pain.

“What’s wrong with you, can’t you hear me?!” “Of course I can hear you, I’m not deaf!”

“Well, I will be if you don’t stop shouting in my ears.”

“Oh yeah, the explosion.”

Cleo said as she let go. Orphen then looked at the Alliance of Sorcerers building, which was utterly beyond recognition. The Cleo spoke, obviously puzzled by something.

“I wonder why the explosion didn’t reach beyond the playground.”

“..... What did you say?”

He looked towards what remained of the playground, and then it dawned on him — — the explosion only occurred within the immediate vicinity of the Alliance of Sorcerers building.

Buildings were turned into rubble, the playground was turned into scorched earth, but the devastation didn't go beyond the playground's fence. He was mystified, why would someone intentionally limit the range of their attack?

“ .....

Open mouthed, Orphen's eyes looked at the mountain of rubble. A minute of two before the Alliance of Sorcerers building stood there, now gone, completely destroyed. Sand and dust was sent everywhere, slowly being scattered by the wind. Then he realized that only he and Cleo were there, Majic was nowhere to be seen.

“Majic, where are you?”

Frantically Orphen ran to the devastated playground. Then he stood still, realizing that more movement would cause further injuries to his internal organs. Nevertheless he looked around the playground, but he couldn't find any trace of his blond friend.

“Majic...”

Cleo moved behind him, and started poking his left wrist.

“I think I’ve found him...”

“Well, where is he?”

Orphen asked. But she didn’t speak, she only pointed her index finger into the air.

He hesitantly looked upwards — —

“Ahhhhhhhhh!”

He cried, as he saw Majic floating two or three metres in the air. Majic was falling towards the ground, noticing this, Orphen hurriedly chanted an incantation.

“I summon thee — —damn it!”



He panicked, as didn't shouted the rest of the incantation. Actually, the second part of the mantra was irrelevant— —all he had to do was pick an object or a location. So Orphen shouted with all his might, as he spoke the rest of the incantation.

“Help! Ma— —jic!”

...Orphen succeed in reducing the speed at which Majic was falling. Orphen could feel the magic being used to control his apprentice's descent, meanwhile he breathed in and out as he wiped his forehead.

After a few minutes, Majic softly touched the ground. Cleo poked Majic in the cheek to see if he was still alive, meanwhile Orphen looked back at the mountain of rubble.

“.....That man...”

He rattled a couple of thoughts about his brain, as he wondered if that figure he saw was caught up in the blast. Orphen sighed, wondering if that guy was the mastermind behind the explosion. If he was, he



wouldn't have died when the building exploded. So that means he must have escaped, and those two idiot brothers had something to do with it...

Aware of what just ensued, some residents of the nearby neighbourhood came out to see what happened. Their faces showed little sympathy.

An old man came towards Orphen, noticing that he was injured. He was a bald man, and his words were not those of compassion.

“Are you a sorcerer?”

“.....Ah. I'm not what you think.”

Orphen replied with a dispassionate voice, though he clearly didn't sway the man.

“I have a feeling that we'll find out sooner or later.”

“.....Huh? What do you mean by that?”

Orphen asked. But the man simply closed his eyes and shook his head.

“Somebody's got to pay.”

“ .....”

Nobody spoke after that. Everybody was silent, and the atmosphere only got tenser.

Orphen was going to punch the man in the mouth, but he noticed something— —it was the rubble, he could hear groaning. The he turned his attention to the oncoming crowd, who started loudly *booing* them.

Then at the pile of rubble, something— —stood up, Orphen thought that it was the silhouette he saw. Orphen gulped, for her remembered that what he saw wasn't human— —but it was something else.

“ .....”

Coming out of the rubble he saw a human being, a 20 something year old woman in fact. She was dressed in low ranking sorcerer robes, and had dark hair that went down to her waist. She stuck out her bruised arm, as she continued to climb out of the rubble. She was now in full view, everybody could see that she was wearing a pair of damaged glasses

and was in pain. Then she made her way towards Orphen, obviously to the crowd.

Orphen stared at her as she approached, he was awestruck— —it was like he was looking at a ghost.

“.....O-Orphen?”

“Steph— —”

It was obvious he knew her name, but she was too exhausted to continue. She fell down— —but luckily Orphen caught her.

“Steph, you’re still here!”

He then heard a loud thud behind him, it was obvious that Cleo wasn’t happy.

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“That’s called sexual harassment buddy, the least you could do is buy me a room if with you want to sleep with me.”

It was night time — —

It just passed twelve, and there were no shadows on the sidewalk. It was beautiful at this time of night, as the moonlight lit up the roads. There were several multi story buildings, this was a civilian residential district. Those who aren't used to this area generally find it strange, as the road here was several meters wide. Several men and women who looked like students walked down this road.

“Are you into that sort of thing?”

The man said, the woman shrugged.

But before they could continue their conversation, a silhouette suddenly appeared in front of them.

“Oh my, what have we here?”

“.....Who are you?”

The tall figure looked about three metres, as it stood there motionless.

“What an idiot.”

“You think you can take us on?”

A couple of the other men joined in to berate the mysterious figure.

“Was that a challenge?”

The mysterious figure said, as his cloak fluttered in the wind revealing a scabbard.

“He’s got a weapon, maybe we should call the police!”

One of the women said.

“What’s wrong, are you afraid of a knife?”

“That goes without saying!”

“Don’t you remember, I said I’ll always protect you.”

“Guys, look out——” The figure pulled out his sword, and the all stopped talking as the figure waved his sword in front of them.

“I won’t allow this idle talk to go on any longer! Behold, my name is——”

“What’s all the commutation out here?!”

Shouting came from one of the nearby dwellings,  
but then— —whack!

“ .....

A potted tulip plant was thrown at the shadowed  
figure’s head, and he silently stumbled to the  
ground.

The man who threw it shook his head in amazement  
as the potted plant was lying at the figures feet, it  
wasn’t even damaged.

Then suddenly— —the silhouette sprung into the air  
as if he was spring loaded toy.

“Damn! Who the hell threw that!?”

“I-It’s a monster!”

The men shrieked and ran away, then the women  
ran after them crying.

“These darn humans, one day I’ll wipe them out by  
blocking their toilets with toilet paper!” “Are you  
okay? Brother...”

From the street corner a similarly dressed figure emerged with a fur cloak, his glasses reflecting the moonlight like two giant eyes.

“It’s nothing.”

“But the pot plant...”

“Ah.”

He wondered what he meant by “ah”, maybe he thought it didn’t hurt him because his skill was so thick.

“What’s with the ah?”

“You wouldn’t understand, to rule the world you’ve got become famous first!”

“How exactly will harassing couples in the night accomplish this?”

“.....We were merely testing our skills.”

“It didn’t look like it.”

“Shut up! One day when I get stronger I’ll finally rule the world and then I’ll make that damn sorcerer

pay!”

He then stomped on the potted plant, and started shouting.

“Once I master the control method, then I’ll be able to rule the world!”

“I’ve told you before! Shut up!!”

A new figure had appeared in the street, sending Vulcan reeling to the ground. Now moonlight filled the streets, enhancing Alenhatan’s ancient beauty.



# Chapter 3: A Challenge from Vulcan

“Over there! Stop them!”

A shout came from behind her...but she couldn't escape it.

She had lost control of her entire body as the pain was too much for her to handle.

Her entire body ached with pain, and another wave of nausea came upon her.

“The damn sorcerer is getting away!”

She could hear someone approaching. Her vision was blurry, so she could barely see anything. The only thing she could see was some wall — — which she quickly passed. She wondered if her legs were even moving, then she remembered that her legs were hit with an iron bar, it should be broken. So that means, she was being dragged...

“Grab her! We can’t let them get away— —”

She held a purse in her hands, she thought about throwing it away but she couldn’t do that. In the purse was a few coins, tomorrow they would guarantee that her stomach would be filled.

She couldn’t afford to throw away the purse, she needed it and it belonged to her. She also wanted to stop moving, but she could do nothing but be carried away.

(This must be a dream, right?)

I must be. Because she wouldn’t be able to move this fast in real life, then it must be a dream.

(If that’s the case, then shouldn’t I wake up soon?)

Her heart was beating intensely.

Gradually her vision was getting darker, something was blocking his view— —it could be the people who were taking her away.

(Who are these people? Do they intend to harm me?)

A black silhouette stretched its skeletal hand out to her.

(Death...)

With this in mind, she threw herself into the hand. The silhouette braced itself for the oncoming attack, and then it spoke.

“What happened? Someone is chasing you? Oh right, it’s me...”

The voice came from behind her. It was very close, so close that he was within reach. His rough hands were already on her— — “Hey, get off me! Let me go!”

She then heard what sounded like swear words, and then she was hit.

“You idiot! You play too rough!”

Another arm was raised— —

“Sword of Light, whom I do release!”

A flash— —an explosion— —moaning. Then she was

unable to get up...

...Now, she couldn't even turn over. It was like she was paralyzed— —or maybe she became a corpse? Her breathing was shallow, and air still flowed into his lungs, but she was still confused.

(It's said that you will remember your past at the moment of death...)

In her mind emerged the face of a man— —a man she remembers.

(It can't be an illusion— —for he shouted my name.)

She felt severe pain as she tried to move. The more her consciousness was restored, the more pain he felt. She knew, that this pain came from her bruises. Though she didn't know if any of his injuries were serious, she just tried not to think about it. For if she did, she was afraid that she would faint.

“Master— —”

She then heard another voice. It was male, but she doesn't know this voice. It was very young— —or

childish voice. He seemed to be talking to someone in another room.

“I think she’s waking up— —”

She could hear the guy talking through the wall, though not clearly.

“Alright, so this needle will do the trick?”

(A needle?)

She had a bad feeling about this. With what little strength she had left she tried to speak.

“Don’t...”

She then heard them scuttling about in the next room, they were getting ready.

“Master——”

Then the door suddenly busted open.

“Majic. You remember the location of the veins, right?”

(——!)

It was a very familiar voice. She wanted to get up and greet him — — but she couldn't move her body, then her widened as he drew near with the needle in hand.

“Orphen!”

She screamed his name. The others were shocked, she blinked — — and the first thing she saw was a gas lamp on the ceiling. Then, she saw a small room covered in a simple wallpaper. There was a steel bed, some furniture and a wardrobe that has seen better days. She then started outside one of the rooms windows, the stars in the night sky were shining ever so brightly — — then she finally realized it, she was in her own apartment.

Now, she looked at the young boy and man.

“Orphen...”

She whispered, and she touched her bandaged right arm with her bandaged left hand.

“Hey, Stephanie.”

He said in a very casual tone.

She wanted to stand up, but she could move her muscles very little. She then wondered how badly her nerves were damaged, though she wasn't worried because they could always be repaired with magic.

“Call me Steph, just like before.”

She said, Orphen shrugged.

“Okay, Steph.”

“Do you know her, Master?”

The young blond boy asked, as he sat on the bed holding her hand.

“When I lived in this city for one year, I worked in a small clinic for a while.”

“I was a patient at the time.”

She — — Stephanie said, then Majic with his slightly flustered face bowed his head to her.

“I-I'm sorry, I didn't know you were that close...”

“Does it really matter?”

“Well...”

Majic realized that he shouldn't interrupt them, but he was curious so.

“I didn't think master would ever work in a clinic, I thought he lingers in dark, illegal and weird places.”

“You seem like a good kid...”

Orphen gave Majic a sinister look for his previous comment— —Stephanie just laughed.

“Well, I you must know. Orphen rescued me when I was injured and brought me to the clinic.”

“That's not how I remember it— —”

Orphen spoke, but he was interrupted by someone coughing.

There was a petite blond girl also standing in the room, they didn't know how long she had been there. She was wearing jeans, and looked rather healthy.



However, from Stephanie's perspective — — she didn't seem very friendly.

The girl pretended that the previous conversation never happened.

“How come you've never told me about her?”

“.....I see that you need to go back to school learn etiquette all over again.”

Orphen said in a condescending tone, the girl angrily stared back.

“Her name is Stephanie. We... are friends.”

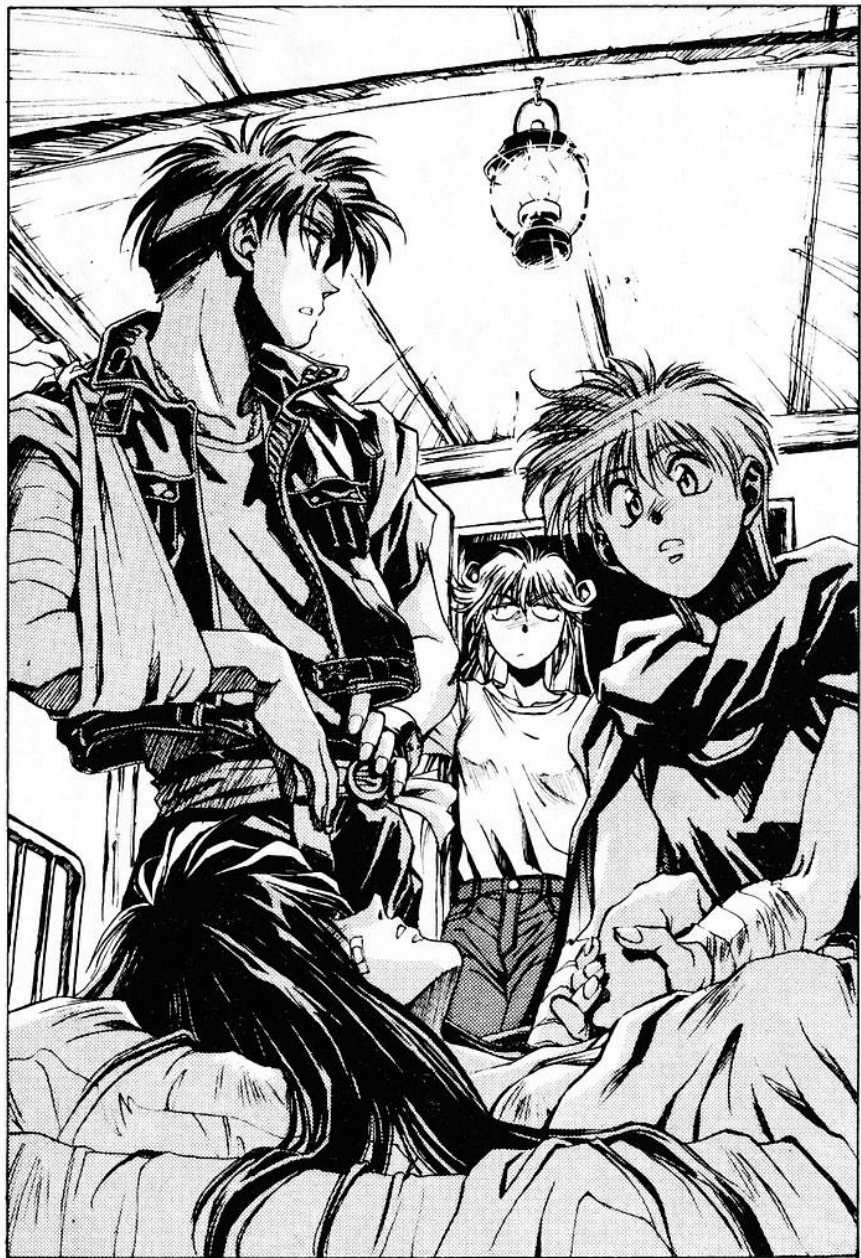
He then spun around and pointed at the blonde girl, then the young boy.

“This is Cleo. And this guy right here is Majic — — my apprentice. We're all on some happy-go-lucky journey...”

“Is that so?”

Majic then butted into their conversation.

“A happy-go-lucky journey!”



“Well, we ran into some trouble with a monster but that’s a story from another time.”

Cleo refused to accept Orphen’s version of events.

“You’re forgetting the part where you tried to commit marriage fraud with my sister and then destroyed part of my house.”

Orphen smiled.

“Looks like the cat is out of the bag.”

Orphen was now in an uppity mood.

“I knew you two would be just baggage, I don’t know why I took you with me.”

“What was that?!”

“Master!”

Majic and Cleo were now in an aggravated mood, they turned to leave the room.

Stephanie didn’t say it, but she didn’t think they were very friendly with each other.

“It’s good that you’ve made some new friends.”

“Yeah...”

Orphen sighed, and started to think about something.

“I bought you a bouquet of flower, but they got lost in all the trouble. Anyways, I really didn’t expect to see you again.”

“But master— —I put those flowers into one of those flower pots we found.”

“Oh yeah, I forgot about that idiot we found yelling in the middle of the road at night.”

Then Stephanie tried to lift her arm, noticing that the pain was subsiding.

“Huh...?”

She groaned a little as she moved, and Majic started to speak proudly.

“Master treated you, he himself was injured but we wanted to take care of you first.”

She then looked at him with a look of gratitude, Orphen was uneasily staring at the ceiling.

“I guess this is my atonement.”

But in the end, she still wasn't able to get out of bed, so she went to sleep— —the aesthetic also helped to put her to sleep.

The next morning she endured the physical pain and stood up, Orphen was impressed. It was noon, and the city bathed in the sun for a while.

Meanwhile, Stephanie tried stretching as to see if her body had healed. She was still a little fatigued, but it was nothing serious. She then moved over to the bedside table, her broken glasses were there, and they were fixed.

(My broken glasses have been fixed, I guess this is Orphen's doing.)

Putting her hands through her hair, she stared into a mirror on the wall.

“I look miserable.”

She then checked all over her body, so she could see the extent of her injuries.

“Hopefully I’ll heal soon and be rid of these bruises...”

Before eating breakfast, she left her room and entered the next.

Her kitchen and living room were one and the same. She saw Cleo sitting cross-legged on the sofa, wearing the same clothes as yesterday. Probably because yesterday she lost all her clothes and luggage.

The atmosphere was tense as she walked across the room.

“Good morning.”

Cleo ignored her at first, but then she spoke.

“I’m sorry...for yesterday.”

The girl was a little shaken, but she continued.

“I shouldn’t have acted that way yesterday. You

must think that I don't understand etiquette."

"Forget about it, it's alright."

She tried to reassure her, but she had something else on her mind. Orphen and that other boy were nowhere to be found.

"Orphen, and that— —Majic was his name? Where did they go?"

"Work. They said they needed to find some way to make money."

Cleo looked depressed as she sat there alone.

Stephanie smiled and then giggled.

"Orphen's angry with you, right?"

Cleo shook her head. She lifted her face, there were tears coming from her eyes. She then stood up from the couch.

"No— —he didn't get angry. He just...said something about you."

Cleo was clearly upset, so Stephanie opened up her

arms and the girl rushed in. As she impacted her, Stephanie groaned a little as her abdomen started to ache. She felt faint again, but she just endured the pain and patted Cleo on the back.

It was easy for them to sympathize with each other. After all, it's not the first time that Orphen has made both of them cry. Though, this meant that he still had a heart.

\*

The canal was quiet, and a boat drifted down the canal until it arrived at a small port to unload.

“You damn newcomers! Get it right this time!”

A kettle was sent flying towards a young man's head, it hit him and he crumpled to the ground.

“The unloading must be done in one hour! If it's not done by then I'll tie rocks to your feet and throw you in the river!”



Orphen recovered from the attack and stood back up, a medium sized cargo ship arrived at the port and began unloading right away. He eyed the goods on board, it was all stone from a quarry that was going to be used for constructing buildings.

“I’m coming!”

Many of the more muscular men were watching his every move, cursing at him because he was moving too slow. But when some of them turned their backs, Orphen knelt down and sighed. Looking down the canal he wondered if life was better somewhere else, then a breathless Majic came up to him and spoke.

“Master.”

Orphen was sweaty, and angrily replied.

“Handle your own work, I’m not here to take your load.”

Orphen then sighed deeply.

“Sorry, it’s just— —you know.”

“.....No, I don’t.”

Orphen ignored him, he put down his stone and wiped his hands. He then stretched a little, then asked a bizarre question.

“Do you believe in love?”

“ .....

Silence filled the air for a moment. Majic then staggered backwards with a confused look, and began shouting.

“Love! You? You’re insane!”

Orphen got up and kicked Majic in the chin, sending him back a couple of paces.

“.....What the hell is wrong with you?!”

Majic said as he began stroking his chin, Orphen was breathing heavily

“Some friend you are...”

But then, their awkward moment was interrupted by an intense rumbling. The waters of the canal

began to shake, and the deckhands were rushing to stop the cargo from sliding about the ship. Then Orphen began to speak.

“What’s going on?”

Then suddenly — — the waters of the canal were sent ten metres into the air, then it came back down like rain. The port workers to rushing about the place and screaming, trying to find out what happened. The waters were beginning to become more turbulent, making all the boats rock left and right.

“Ha ha ha ha!”

“What?”

Orphen just stood there, stunned. He was starting to feel a little seasick due to the rocking of the boat, but he tried not to let that bother him.

The laughter continued.

“Muhahahahahaha!”

But it wasn’t the laughter that disturbed Orphen, it was something more incredible.

In the canal there stood a ten meter statue — — the lower parts of its body were covered in water, leaving its massive upper body exposed. It looked like a giant muscular stone man, it had four hands and two pairs of arms. Compared to the rest of the body, its head was rather small, you couldn't even make out its eyes or nose.

Then he noticed it, there was a piece cloth on top of its head. Written on it was a symbol, or a word.

(A magical word?)

Orphen whispered to himself. He then pondered, wondering if those words gave the statue life.

“W-What is that?”

Majic cried. Orphen knew what it was.

“It think it's a megalithic infantryman, in other words, a golem.”

“Mu ha ha ha ha ha!”

“It's an ancient weapon — — manufactured by the Heavenly Being's.”

“Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!”

“Wait a second, I know that laugh.”

Orphen stared at the megalithic infantryman, there was something else that appeared on its head. It was shaking and dripping like a wet dog— —there was no mistaking it, it was Vulcan. His fur cloak was wrapped around his body, and it was covered in seaweed. Vulcan laughed maniacally like someone from a mental ward, then he suddenly stopped and started shouting.

“Well, aren’t I noisy? Sorry but I just couldn’t help laughing out loud!”

He cackled again, as he started at Orphen he could see large veins pumping on his forehead.

“Who cares if you popped out of the canal, you should have just stayed in there!”

“How dare you! You— —you, scruffy sorcerer!”

“Oh! What have you done with your brain, have you replaced it with the egg of a praying mantis? Also,

have you forget about all that money you owe me!?”

“Shut up! I’ll knock you senseless with this rusty sword of mine!”

“Bring it on! Besides, you shouldn’t use it to clean out your earwax!”

“Master...”

Majic said waveringly.

“What?”

Orphen said as he turned around. Majic helplessly sighed and spoke.

“People are watching...can’t you up the ante?”

“Oh, I understand.”

After Orphen spoke, he prepared to do more shouting.

“Hey asshole! Are we just going to talk all day!?”

“Oh, boy.”

Majic moaned.

Then both of them started chucking insults at each other for a while, until both of them were out of breath.

Lying on top of the golem's head, Vulcan spoke.

“Well, well, well...no matter how much a dog barks. It's no match for the first megalithic infantryman — —hereby dubbed, Polk-Han”

“.....Where did you get that thing?”

Orphen stepped back and asked, Vulcan was proud to reply.

“Oh, ho ho ho ho! Wouldn't you like to know. Anyway, it's time to crush some bugs with an oversized frying pan! “

“Damn...”

Orphen sneered, he then took a battle stance.

“This is it Majic...we're done for.”

“Master!”

“Ah ha ha ha ha ah! It's about time you gave up!

Now don't move, it's time to die!"

"Master!"

Majic grabbed Orphen by the arm.

"Who said I was giving up?"

Orphen clenched his fist, Majic watched him closely.

"Then why don't you do something, who else is supposed to protect me?!"

".....Boy, do you really want those to be your last words?"

Vulcan said, as he rode atop the stone giant.

".....Hey asshole!"

Orphen stretch forth his hands and began chanting.

"Sword of Light, whom I do release!"

A wave of concentrated light flew from Orphen's hand and hit the megalithic infantryman, shattering its upper body. Pieces of its body rained down into the canal, creating small tsunamis that hit the port.



“Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh...”

Vulcan too was sent flying through the air into the canal, his scream reached all over the area. And like the rest of the stones, he sunk into the water and disappeared.

“.....”

Orphen stood up straight, he started at what was left of the megalithic infantryman. Its entire upper body was gone.

“Uhm...master. Won't that guy drown?”

Majic said, as he felt sorry for Vulcan as he disappeared under the water.

“He can drown for all I care...”

A wry smile appeared on his face.

“Though don't worry, I'm sure he'll be back.”

Orphen said as he turned and walked towards one of the port workers. The man had one-eye, and was intensely staring at Orphen.

“I’m sorry. We can’t employ a sorcerer.”

“Oh, I didn’t mean to hide it from you.”

Orphen was very tired, and he didn’t want to argue with the man. He then pointed to the cargo ship he was on when the golem attacked.

“By the way, that explosion there now created a huge hole in bottom of that boat.”

“Wait, what!”

Tears appeared in the man’s eyes. He watched the ship that was loaded with stone sink rapidly, within the blink of an eye he couldn’t even see the mast anymore.

“You bastard!”

But before he knew it, Orphen was already gone. He just sat there grinding his teeth until the enamel started to rub off.

Orphen was heading to Stephanie’s apartment, it was ten minutes away.

Majic hurriedly rushed after him, obviously flustered that Orphen left him.

“Master, you left me back there.”

“Oh Majic, good to see you made it.”

“Master, what’s wrong? You’ve been acting very strange today.”

“Shit, shit, shit!”

Orphen shouted as he stomped his feet on the ground. Majic then remembered some of the stuff Vulcan shouted at Orphen.

“If you are so much about me then why don’t you go to some far off place and start mining gold! That way I won’t be looking over my shoulder for loan sharks!”

“.....Master.”

“What’s wrong with you, men can be friends without being in love!”

“ ..... ”

Majic looked up and down at Orphen, wondering what has come over him.

Orphen started to squat on the ground and sigh deeply.

“Ah— —just my luck.”

“Master, you’re freaking me out. It’s like you’re personality has changed.”

Upon hearing Majic’s words, he immediately stood up.

“.....Majic.”

“Why have you become like this?”

“Majic, how do you feel about Stephanie?”

“What?”

“The first time you met her, what did you feel?”

“Well...”

Majic’s eyes blinked as he was lost in thought.

“She was covered in wounds— —and she seems like

a very nice person. Her rooms are all nicely furnished. The cake that was in the cupboard was handmade, but she used too much flour— —or was she even trying to make a cake? My mother always told me that you've got to put cream on top of a cake, that way it's more appetizing. Though that cake she made had been sitting there for a while and was stale, what a pity. Her bathroom was just like any other girls, though her closet was falling apart. There was quite a lot of books lying about the place and she had a lot of money. Upon closing inspection, you'd easily know that she was a sorcerer."

Orphen just slumped his shoulders.

"You were so confident when you spoke, but do you think your assumptions were right?"

"Yes."

"Remember this Majic, you can never judge a person from a first meeting."

Orphen said, as a cold sweat went down his back.

Then a sharp sound ripped through the air, a black object grazed Orphen's left ear— —fortunately he avoided it. If he didn't, he would have probably lost his entire left ear.

“You people!”

In the empty road in front of them, a gust of wind quietly blew through.

“———?”

Within the blink of an eye his entire vision was obscured with a white flash. Instinctively, Orphen covered his face. At the same time he tried his best to curb the screaming coming from his throat.

The suddenly, he heard someone talk.

“So, you won't scream— —is it because you want to save your breath, so you can chant a mantra?”

His vision started to return to him, and through the cracks in his fingers he could make out a figure.

“How can you remain so silent?”

Suddenly Orphen could feel himself being pulled in multiple directions like a pinball in a pachinko machine. He couldn't even tell what direction he was heading, he was in a confused state. He could see the ground— —the roof of the apartment building— —and finally the sky— —he couldn't take it anymore and was knocked unconscious.

When he finally awoke, it took him a while to realize it, he had been thrown into the ground. His breath wasn't smooth, in fact he was coughing a lot as he struggled to get up. He found himself unable to think, and he found it more difficult to breath.

“Today, I'll blow your head clean off.”

Orphen could hear someone speaking, he then looked for him.

(A sorcerer— —obviously not human.)

He didn't hear another incantation.

“Master!

Majic shouted. Orphen's breathing was now become

more ragged, and he stuck out his hand to Majic. He helped him stand up.

“.....What happened?”

Orphen asked.

“You were sent ten metres into the air, then a black object was sent flying at you. It hit you in the head and then you whacked the ground.”

“.....I fell?”

Orphen looked in the direction that Majic pointed at, that’s when he saw him — —his hand was clenched. Orphen could see bluish skin in the parts of its body that wasn’t covered by its garments, it clearly wasn’t human. Then Orphen watched as a metal wire was pulled from its wrist, it was like the whole process was automated.

“There!”

Orphen shouted, he then pointed his hand in the direction of the bluish figure.

“Sword of Light, whom I do release!”



A bright white flash of light shot towards the figure, the wave of intense heat swallowed the figure whole. Then a resounding explosion could be heard, but— — Then the flame suddenly disappeared— — the figure was still standing.

The heat burned off its clothes, it was now in full view. There were mysterious runes all over its body, it looked artificial— —as if someone created it. Its skin looked very smooth as it shone in the sunlight. It was totally naked, Orphen wondered if it even needed to wear clothes.

“Is that a man?”

Majic asked, Orphen whispered “no” to himself. Then it spoke through an opening in its face.

“I was once a guardian of hidden treasure”

“.....Guardian of hidden treasure?”

“Hundreds of years ago, you humans called us... killing dolls.”

“What— —?”

Orphen wondered for a moment, as he listened to its shrill voice.

(How did...)

Orphen wanted to talk to it, but— —

(That buzzing?)

He and looked at Majic, who also looked like he wanted to say something. During this moment, the noise emanating from the guardian only got louder.

(Just what is it planning?)

Orphen wore a panicked look, while the killing doll had a murderous grin.

“Playtimes over!”

(— — — —!)

Orphen and Majic started to step backwards, then a bright flash light shone from the killing dolls abdomen. Something was written there, it was like a tattoo, or maybe a magic seal.

(A magical word!)

Orphen couldn't read the word, but he concluded that the noise was coming from there.

“As you can imagine, it's magic.”

(.....Can he read my mind?)

“It's the obvious assumption.”

Orphen retorted.

“The text on my body could easily kill one hundred sorcerers.”

The killing doll said, then it brought its hand to eye level—its middle finger made a loud clicking sound as a ten centimetre needle popped out. Seeing their shock, the killing doll began to laugh.

“Don't worry, I won't kill you...for now.”

(.....What?)

Orphen said inside himself, then the doll spoke again.

“I will exterminate you and your kind, not one of you will survive.”

(Why does he need to exterminate us? Did he destroy the Alliance of Sorcerer's building?)

"I'm only following the mission."

The doll continued.

"Not everyone in that building was killed, right?"

(.....!)

"I saw a woman come out of the rubble, I'll be coming after the both of you."

(Did he follow me to Steph's house?)

"Your strength is very strong...wherever you go in this city, I'll be able to sense you with this symbol on my abdomen."

(.....)

Orphen didn't know if the doll followed him back to Stephanie's apartment— —for if he did, the others would be in danger.

"By your silence I can tell you have very strong self-control, but how long can you keep it up?"

The doll looked him straight in the eye, Orphen was starting to sweat.

A devilish smile appeared on the doll's face, the text on its body started to disappear. Then the doll let out a loud laugh.

“I'll see you soon.”



“You bastard!”

Orphen cursed at the doll, but he didn't seem to care.

“I've got something for you.”

The doll threw a piece of paper at Orphen's feet, Orphen didn't know where he pulled the piece of paper from.

“.....?”

Majic and Orphen stared at the piece of paper, meanwhile the doll laughed.

“It's a challenge, for you...and your friends.”

“What?”

Orphen said softly, as he picked up the piece of paper. Orphen then angrily repeated the message.

“The day after tomorrow in the *Bajirikokku ruins*, let us battle it out— —Volcano Vulcan.”

Orphen then torn up the piece of paper and throw it on the ground.

“Ha! That damn asshole thinks he can take me on, I’ll show him whose boss!”

“Vulcan is my master.”

The Killing Doll said in a very serious tone.

“Master?”

Orphen said, obviously puzzled.

“I understand — — but what about that golem he had?”

“There’s more where they came from. There were placed there to guard the ruins — — he’s got all of them under his control.”

“You’ve got to be kidding! Why does a *killing doll* like you listen to the words of a fool!?”

Orphen was about to continue talking but the killing doll’s laughter interrupted him.

“I see nothing wrong with them — — those two brothers are quite a pair. I can read their hearts, unlike you — — black sorcerer Orphen.



“.....”

“They’ve also had a lot to say about you — — they said you’re a very powerful sorcerer and they were right. Unfortunately, I can’t let you live.”

“So that’s why you’re after me!”

Orphen shouted.

“You humans are like cockroaches, you kill one and more appear.”

Now a wry smile appeared on the doll’s face.

“And if you try to run, I’ll kill all the sorcerers left in this city.”

Orphen gritted his teeth.

“Why would you go after them?”

“Because I was made by the Heavenly Beings — — and they wanted me to kill human sorcerers.”

And with that, the killing doll disappeared without a trace.

“Is it gone for good this time?”

Majic said suspiciously.

Then the doll's voice echoed.

“I expect you to arrive — — the day after tomorrow, at the *Bajirikokku fort*.”

“Whatever asshole! I'll come and kick that damn raccoon dog's ass!”

Orphen roared, as he waved his fists. He wondered whether he will survive his next confrontation with the killing doll — — but one thing was for certain, he must win.

# Chapter 4: Bajirikokku Fort

*“Bajirikokku?”*

As soon as Stephanie heard the word, she lifted her face up.

“I had to ask before I went.”

Orphen bandaged his injured right arm, then he angrily replied.

“...This Killing Doll — — does he plan to kill all members of the *Alliance of Sorcerers*? What is his goal? Where is the *Bajirikokku fort*?”

Four people sat in Stephanie’s small apartment — — Orphen, Stephanie, Majic, and lastly Cleo, making the room even more crowded. Orphen angrily bandaged himself, and not just his right arm, his face was covered with large and small Band-Aids. Majic stood behind his master, helping to wrap the

bandages around his head. Cleo didn't seem to be doing anything to help, she just sat on the sofa.

Stephanie started stroking her long hair, which was along her chest.

“Why did you think about asking me?”

“You didn't seem flustered.”

Orphen said softly, as he wrapped bandages around his right arm.

“The Alliance of Sorcerers building suddenly exploded— —you were seriously injured, yet you didn't panic when you awoke the next morning. That's the only reason— —you know something.”

“...It was just a gas explosion.”

Stephanie said as she raised her hands, she had a look of fear on her face.

“Really? You seem delusional— —the playground's slide was bent beyond recognition, the irons bars were torn from the ground and sent into the air. A billboard was torn to pieces, and hit me in the head.

“...A piece of word wasn’t the only thing that hit me.”

Majic said behind him, Orphen ignored him.

“Don’t lie to me, Stephanie — — it was magic. And that guy that did it wasn’t human.”

Stephanie was taken aback, she raised her head.

“I-I didn’t lie to you!”

“You sure?”

Orphen’s tone was sharp.

Using her fingers, Stephanie pushed her hair to hide her face — — then Cleo approached her, she tightly held her hands. Stephanie saw the girl’s sympathetic expression, she remembered that time when she comforted her.

“Huh?”

Orphen didn’t understand.

“.....”

Orphen didn’t want to press her too much, so he

choose to remain silent. While holding Cleo's hands, Stephanie began to speak.

"Orphen, do you remember when we first met?"

"Yes."

Orphen said softly.

"Twenty four fractures, you were seriously wounded, and eighty percent of your body was covered in lacerations and beyond repair. Facial injuries— —skull fracture, your internal organs didn't suffer much damage thanks to my intervention, but when I brought you to the clinic, no one thought you could be saved."

"I was fighting people on the street who were trying to lynch me."

Stephanie spoke with a hoarse voice, Cleo put her hand on her shoulder.

Majic almost jumped.

"A lynching? Master— —I thought you said it wasn't that serious."

“On the surface, this town seems like a tourist city. But what you see isn’t always what you get. Sure they’ll greet you like everybody else, but if you walk into a back alley...you might not come out alive.”

“But...”

Majic turned and walked in front of Orphen.

“Why would they do that you ask? Listen, the Heavenly Beings once lived here — —but they’re gone now. They hated sorcerers a lot, but that was hundreds of years ago. But still they’re hatred lives on...” “But why does such prejudice continue?”

“I don’t know, maybe some people think the era which sorcerers were hunted...never ended.”

Orphen’s tone became sombre.

“It’s got to do with power, Majic. Ordinary people are afraid of what sorcerers can do, not just the Royal Family. They are all afraid of what they don’t understand, but then again...this city does have a history of persecution.”

“But— —”

“The history lesson is over, move it.”

Orphen said as he pushed Majic aside.

“Stephanie. When I carried you to the clinic, I saw what they did to you. Why didn’t you leave?”

“...I had to pay off the surgery. And— —”

“And?”

Orphen asked.

Stephanie looked at him.

“You left me, when I got out of the hospital you disappeared...”

“I had my own problems to deal with. Besides, I couldn’t live a laid-back lifestyle anymore. To be honest, I’m surprised that you remember me considering you spent six months in the hospital.”

Orphen thought that his tone was too cold.

“I...”



“Orphen, you shouldn’t say such things— —”

Cleo didn’t know exactly what happened between them two, she just didn’t want anyone to become upset.

Orphen ignored her and continued talking.

“Stephanie. I’m not interrogating you— —I’m just looking for a little clarification. That *Killing Doll* threatened to kill all sorcerers in this city, that means me and you. We’ve got to work together if we are to win...”

“I can’t help you. I didn’t receive special combat training like you, I’m not strong enough— —”

“But you have the knowledge.”

Orphen said, he was becoming impatient.

“Right? If you know anything about this guy, you’ve got to tell me.”

“.....”

Stephanie didn’t utter a word, Cleo let go of her

hands— —then as if she was sleep walking, she walked towards the window. Putting her hands on the windowsill, she rubbed her finger into the dirt and then stared at it.

“The window isn’t open...so there’s no way to do the cleaning.”

Orphen didn’t say anything, he just folded his arms as he looked at her back.

Stephanie then spoke.

“I did try to leave the city, but I just couldn’t ignore the existence of— —”

“Stephanie!”

Orphen shouted at her, she turned away from him. Then Stephanie spoke, her voice wavered.

“But you...promised me.”

“What promise?”

Orphen asked, her face was serious now.

“You promised me...you said you’d never leave me.”

\*

His small fingers touched the cube sticking out of the wall, then he sighed. His noise itched in the moist air, and it made his throat thirsty. Maybe he had a cold, he then rested his head upon the wall.

His vision became distorted, he removed and wiped his glasses.

“I wonder what went wrong.” “Muhahahaha!”

Vulcan made lots of noise. He was in a room with an altar, there were many megalithic infantry lined up.

“Oh my, what a spectacular sight this is! This is great, now I’ve got my very own army of stone soldiers! That damn sorcerer will be quaking in his boots, and after I’ve got rid of him then I’ll set my sights on the world! And all who stand in my way will be smothered to death with a pillow!”

Dortin didn’t take his words seriously, he just rolled

his eyes. Vulcan put his damp hands on his waist, he then faced the megalithic infantry and giggled like a madman.

Pain came from Dortin's stomach, he coughed a few times.

Vulcan heard him coughing, and sneered angrily.

“Oh, poor baby. Too bad for you there's no medicine, so you'll just have to die.”

“.....”

Dortin didn't say anything, he just sat on the ground. His back shivering off the cold stone.

Vulcan continued to laugh loudly, he then waved his hand towards the megalithic infantry.

“It's naming time! Starting from the right— —”

The megalithic infantry all had a magical character stuck to them, they all looked the same, but Vulcan wanted to give them names. He started to call them one by one.

“Dee fly, Tsukatikku, Tyler, Mike Stack,  
Kebinpeppera, Shipure Kyato Sohofu...”

Calling each name, the stone giants raised their  
hands.

“Brother, I said...”

Vulcan couldn’t hear him, he was too engorged in  
his activities.

“Dakada, Heida, Monkey 1000 — —”



“Brother!”

Dortin shouted as he stood up— —this made Vulcan jump, he gave Dortin an angry look and turned back towards the megalithic infantry.

Dortin put his hands on his head and whispered.

“Brother, I’m really cold— —and my head hurts.”

“How can you say that? When the weather’s so good.”

“Summer hasn’t arrived yet, I feel like I’m sitting in a bucket of cold water! It’s impossible not to be cold in a place like this!”

“Oh, I’m not feeling a thing.”

“Where can I get these hallucinogenic drugs that you seem to be on, brother?!”

Dortin said. When Vulcan heard these words he just laughed.

“I Vulcan, the Masmaturian Bulldog am impervious to everything! Including the weather!”

Dortin's stomach rumbled.

“When was the last time you ate?”

“I don't remember! I don't remember!”

Vulcan's attitude changed, he then folded his arms and began to laugh uncontrollably. Dortin sighed, as he tried to hold in the pain of his stomach...

No one could be comfortable in this room, even if it was a million square meters, you would still feel like you were suffocating. Light poured down from the ceiling, there was a strange white ball overhead — — unlike an ordinary gas lamp, unlike sunlight pouring into a window. There was a hoarse, a rhino that looked like it was carrying a bathtub, and a couple of other animals. Standing in the middle of them was a human — — a beautiful woman. Behind them hung a huge portrait of a woman, it was about five times taller than the statues. She had green eyes and green pupils, she was wearing beautiful green robes. Her face was slim and she looked very healthy, you could easily tell the painter put lots of



effort into this painting. Below the portrait was carved “Sister Isutashiba”, that was probably her name.

(Sister, she seems like a monk...or a priest.)

Dortin thought, as he stared at the portrait in the middle of the room.

These “ruins” as the Killing Doll called it, seem to have been here for hundreds of years— —but there isn’t even a speck of dust. Well, it wasn’t really spotless, there were traces of cleaning everywhere. Just like— — (I wonder if other people have been here to investigate recently.)

If this is true, then Vulcan has been listening to the Guardian of the treasure, and opened this place up.

(If someone else had come down here they would have claimed ownership over the ruins. Either that or that doll has taken care of any intruders.) Dortin looked over at Vulcan, who was thinking about something.

“Brother, where did the Killing Doll go?”

\*

Something crawled in the darkness under the canal. Slithering along, it bounced back to avoid being seen by a passing ship. The canal was generally quiet during the night, but some ships were still loading and unloading goods.

From the south street came the sound of a bell — — it was from a clock tower. It rang for a moment, then fell silent.

“It’s midnight.”

Orphen said, as he looked at a pocket watch he pulled from his pocket. He was overlooking the canal, and the night wind blew through his hair.

The same night wind blew through Cleo’s blond hair, she nervously looked around. The girl had no other clothes to wear, so she had to borrow money

from Orphen to buy a new shirt.

“I feel sorry for her.”

“Who?”

“Stephanie, who else!”

Cleo was serious, Orphen just sighed.

“She lives in a city where she’s not welcome, it must be hard on her.”

“But she’s strong.”

“That’s not what I meant— —Orphen, strong people like you can’t understand. When you’re weak you’ve got to be constantly on your guard, looking over your shoulder because you know that someone out there will do you harm.”

“I know she’s strong, she’s not weak.”

“You still don’t understand.”

Cleo said in anger, it was like she was scolding a student.

“Do you think that because someone is strong that

they'll become a wrestler?"

Orphen gave her a confused look.

"After the surgery, her strength decreased sharply."

"I guess it's plausible."

"...Don't you understand?"

Cleo questioned him, but he avoided answering the question and tried to change the topic.

"You seem to know a lot about being weak, Cleo."

"...When I was a child, I was frail and sick. The doctor said— —it wasn't anything serious, that I would get better. I was bedridden for quite a while, my sister would always comfort me and tell me not to worry. Slowly by slowly, I got better— —but during that time when I was weak, I couldn't help but feel helpless. It was horrible..."

"But at least you got better in the end, right?"

"...Yeah."

Cleo whispered, then she sensed something and

turned around to face it.

“He’s coming.”

Orphen looked, Majic was carrying a huge lump of something in the middle of the street— —even at this time of the night you could see his frustration. Orphen could hear muttering until Majic came before him and dropped the luggage, then he started to complain.

“Geez, if I move anymore my feet are going to fall off...or worse.”

Majic said as he rubbed his feet. A wry smile appeared on Orphen’s face.

“Exploitation of the weak is a natural thing.”

“...That isn’t right...”

Orphen ignored Majic, he then began rummaging through the luggage— —portable gas lights, mountain climbing rope, emergency rations, and — — Orphen immediately stopped, and pulled something slender from the luggage.

“Why did you bring Cleo’s sword?”

“Because I told him so.”

Cleo spoke proudly, as she snatched the sword from Orphen’s grasp.

“And don’t think for one second that I’m leaving, I can be helpful too.”

“Sure you are.”

Orphen made a rude gesture towards Cleo, signalling that she should shut up. He then continued to look through the luggage.

Majic looked a little nervous as he spoke.

“So, don’t I get a weapon?”

“No.”

Looking through the bags, Orphen lifted up the foodstuffs and chucked it at Majic.

“Take this.”

“...I knew this would happen.”

“This too.”

Cleo also gave him her sword. Majic didn't even argue, he just sighed.

“Anyway, take it slow.”

Orphen stood up and put both hands on his knees, then leaned forward. Majic looked down the street. There wasn't a soul about, only the dim street lights that lit the road.

“Master sure is found of teasing people, I think he enjoys making people angry.”

Majic said as he carried the luggage. Orphen pondered for a moment, then he made up his mind. But...

“Can I come?”

Cleo eagerly asked.

Stephanie appeared below one of the street lights, her footsteps echoing in the night. With her hands at her sides, she wearily looked through her purple

glasses...

“...To be honest, I don’t want to go back there. Because — — all those sorcerers from the Alliance of Sorcerers were killed there.”

“It’s not your fault, you’re a survivor.”

“Is that so?”

Stephanie’s voice sounded tired, she tossed her hair back as she looked down the canal — — Orphen also leaned forward, staring at the water.

Stephanie started to talk.

“Alenhatan — — this city was once inhabited by the Heavenly Beings. If you pick up an old map, you won’t find the current street names on it. It was mostly a small walled city back then, called *Bajirikokku*...”

“*Bajirikokku* — — the legendary monster?”

Orphen said, then Stephanie lightly shrugged her shoulders.



“Probably. It was a deadly magical beast unleashed by the Heavenly Beings, about 1000 years ago. Apparently they tried to use it to help them defeat their enemies — — according to history books, the Heavenly Being’s used it to defend Bajirikokku fort. However, the walls of the city were destroyed in the fighting and the area became a desert. But that battle proved to only to weaken them, as the Heavenly Being’s lost more than half of their people.”

“...A desert?”

Orphen whispered, he then looked at the canal — — it was full of water, the entire city was.

Stephanie just laughed out loud.

“It was called the *Battle of Bajirikokku fort*. After the battle, the land became unfit to live in. So the remaining Heavenly Being’s used magic to make the land usable again, they built a canal...then Alenhatan city came after. From this city, our human ancestors migrated all over the continent.

Then— —”

“Hundreds of years later, the Heavenly Being’s disappeared.”

Orphen finished her sentence, both of them looked at each other.

“The walled city, does parts of it still exist? The *Killing Doll* said the place to meet was the *Bajirikokku fort*.”

Stephanie looked down the canal, and shook her head.

“No. The walled city and the *Bajirikokku fort* were destroyed a thousand years ago, they don’t exist anymore.”

“Then why would he suggest that place?”

“ .....

Stephanie was silent, she then looked to her side. She saw Cleo and Majic standing nearby.

“Are you brining those two kids with you? To...the

Killing Doll.”

“They’re strong headed, especially Cleo.”

“They are brave...but obviously they’re powers are limited. I doubt they’ll continue following you for much longer.”

“He might not, but she will.”

Orphen angrily looked at Cleo.

“Don’t be like that.”

Stephanie said, she then put her hands to her sides.

“Anyway, back to the matter at hand. The *Bajirikokku fort* was actually the underground part of the city, even when *Bajirikokku* turned the area to sand, he didn’t do much damage to the underground sections.”

“So...”

“Parts of it still exist...under the canal.”

Listening to her, Orphen leaned forward and looked at the canal. It was too dark, so he couldn’t make out

much.

“Have you ever been down there?”

“More than once, I organized a research team to investigate the ruins. We thought we could find ancient weapons and information, but we were too hasty...”

Stephanie stopped talking for a moment.

“A week ago, the last time I went down there...we found it.”

“What did you find?”

“...We thought it was just some puppet. We took it back to the lab, and after several days of investigation...we found out it wasn’t just a puppet.”

“What do you mean?”

“It was a Killing Doll— —an ancient weapon created by the Heavenly Beings to hunt down our kind.”

“And that’s what destroyed the Alliance of Sorcerers building...”

Orphen asked, Stephanie bit her lip.

“Yes. We woke up a sleeping...killing machine, we were careless.”

“...But even so, why hasn't it eliminated all of the sorcerers in the city yet?”

“I don't know. All I remember is that words appeared all over its body — — then everything's a blur.”

“They seem to be magic words.”

“I know. But Orphen, it can use the Heavenly Being's magic — — you can't win.”

“I've got a trick or two...”

Orphen muttered in a low tone, he then waved towards Majic and Cleo.

“Hey! You two! Come over here!”

Cleo ran towards him like a bolt of lightning, a gust of wind flying behind her. Majic was much slower, for he was carrying heavy luggage.

Cleo stood proudly and spoke.

“So, is you’re secret talk over?”

“It wasn’t really secret.”

“...That’s good to hear. Though next time don’t behind my back, okay?”



Orphen put his arms around her, and started caressing her hair with his fingers.

“W-What are you doing, Orphen?”

Cleo started to panic. Orphen ignored her, he then whispered in her ear.

“Cleo. I have one thing to say.”

“...W-What is it?”

“I...”

Orphen gave Majic a look, Majic secretly sighed. He began to take out the climbing rope from the luggage.

Orphen secretly took the rope from him, and immediately started tying up Cleo. He was so fast that she didn't even know what was going on until it was too late, now she was angry.

“Orphen! What's the big idea?”

She didn't get an answer. Her whole body was tied with rope, one would think that it looked like some



kind of weird rope bondage fetish. With a grin on his face, Orphen kicked Cleo to the ground.

“You’ve done well, my apprentice.”

Orphen said as he looked at Majic, who wasn’t as ecstatic.

“Here’s a list of things I took from the carriage...”

Majic murmured softly.

Cleo’s hands were tied, so she wasn’t able to stand back up. She squirmed like an angry caterpillar, her eyes filled with rage.

“How dare you! You lied to me!”

“Who lied to you? I said you could come along, I just didn’t say how far.”

“Fine! Liar!”

“Oh, shut your trap. Majic, get me a towel from the luggage.”

“Help! I’m being kidnapped! Rape! Somebody save me——”

Orphen stuffed a towel in her mouth, she couldn't speak any longer, only moan. A lecherous grin appeared on Orphen's face, as Orphen stroked her hair.

"Wow, you're very cute like this, Cleo."

"Pervert..."

Majic said behind Orphen's back. This naturally resulted in Orphen punching him in the gut.

"Watch your mouth, boy!"

"Ouch...what next Master? What are we going to do with Cleo?"

"Well, you can tie her to a tree...just don't do anything."

Orphen said, he was very harsh about his last comment. Majic showed an expression of relief, and then he started to move.

"I can't do this! I can't leave Cleo in this state, misfortune is sure to follow me if I do."

“Do as I say!”

“I won’t! She’ll surely find some way to get her revenge on us, she’ll tie us upside down to a tree until blood rushes to our head. Then we’ll be roasted over a fire and fried like marshmallows.”

Majic would clearly distraught, Orphen’s gaze fell upon the struggling Cleo.

“...I can’t believe this...”

“Ugh— —!”

Cleo vigorously groaned.

“Forget it, just keep her here. There aren’t that many people out at this type of night.”

“...But what if we run into some human traffickers?”

“Well, hide her in an alleyway.”

“There could be wild dogs there!”

“Ugh— —! Ugh— —!”

“Then hang here over the canal.”

“She’ll be bait for the fish, or worse...sailors.”

“Ugh——!”

“Wait...”

Stephanie spoke up.

“I’ll guard her.”

“No. I need you to take me to the *Bajirikokku Fort*. Stow her insider a cargo ship, she should be okay until dawn.”

“There could be maggots...Cleo would scream her head off.”

“Ugh——!”

“Hey, throw her in here.”

Orphen motioned towards a small cargo ship.

“This has to be done, Cleo.”

“Ugh——!”

“So...Stephanie, how do we get to the *Bajirikokku Fort*? We can’t dive into the river just like Vulcan,

especially with this luggage.”

“Ugh——!”

“We should be able to get in through the sewers.”

“Come on Master, at least take a couple pieces of luggage.”

“Ugh——! Ugh——!”

Orphen ignored them, and walked away with Stephanie. He heard constant moaning behind him for some time——but then he couldn’t hear them anymore.

Orphen gave a sigh of relief, Stephanie was behind him, and now both of them picked up the pace.

\*

Orphen’s figure disappeared into the sewer, but Cleo didn’t stop moaning. Cleo now forced the towel from her mouth, the towel was very moist from her

saliva. Cleo tried her best to move towards the direction which Orphen went, and shouted.

“Don’t leave me behind!”

Thunk! She whacked her shoulder off the ground.

“How dare he tie me up with a rope! And you — — I can’t believe you, you would probably let me be eaten by dogs. Or worse, use me as bait for the sailors.”

She then started to think for a while.

“That’s it, its war! I’ll make his life a living hell — — I’ll put thumbtacks in his bed, I’ll pout hot water on his windows.”

She started making a list in her head.

“While he’s sleeping I’ll put sheep’s blood in his shoes, then I’ll paint his face too — — he’ll want to wipe off the paint, but he’ll find that the towels are all soaked in lemon juice. He’ll then try and use a kitchen towel to wipe his face, but the stairs will be covered in shards of glass. Then I’ll strike, with all

my might I'll push him down the stairs..."

Majic thought she had finished talking, but then he realized that the rope snapped. She was now getting up, and she had the look of a thousand hell hounds in her eyes.

"Come, let us begin my revenge."

Cleo wore a devilish grin, Majic was scared beyond belief.

"Now, where do we find a pig?"

Then...

They heard a bubbling sound— —it was coming from the canal, the water level was rising. Cleo frowned, then an explosion sent water flying into the air.

"Ahaahahaha!"

A burst of laughter broke the silence of the night. A column of water stood ten metres high, then it fell — —revealing a stone giant, there was a short stocky figure standing on its shoulder.

“...I have a very bad feeling about this.”



# Chapter 5: It... continued the mission

“Don’t expect us to give up so easily!”

Cleo’s hair was wet, she shook her head while she shouted with a sharp voice. But parts of her body were still tied with rope, so she was easily grabbed by the golem.

She was helpless, its grasp was so strong that she couldn’t even speak.

“I’m being kidnapped! You Devil! You smell like you haven’t washed in a week!”

“.....”

Vulcan looked down upon her from the stone giant.

“Well, looks like that damn sorcerer isn’t here... you’ll just have to do.”

They were now in an open hall with an altar— —

they are in the Bajirikokku Fort. Cleo was struggling in the golem's grasp, behind them was a portrait of a green haired woman.

“Stop squirming.”

“I'll stop squirming when I have my hands round you're neck!”

Behind her was Vulcan, who was happily sitting on a small throne.

He then stood up, and made a hand gesture.

“I will eliminate the root of all evil! The enemy of all common people! The loan shark sorcerer!”

“Can you even do that?”

Cleo asked. Vulcan laughed confidently.

“Of course I can, and then my debt will be gone!”

“That's a lame ambition.”

“What was that? My loyal followers will not tolerate such an insult against their master!”

“You're the type of guy who bullies girls with stone

giants. What's wrong, can't you do it yourself?"

"How dare you! Say that again and I'll have you squeezed like a grape!"

"....."

Cleo didn't want to anger him any further, for he might actually use the stone giants to harm her. She could only sit there helplessly, waiting for someone to come to her aid.

\*

They made their way along the embankment of the canal — —until they found a crack in the wall. They slipped through and found a small room, in the middle of the room there was a manhole.

Opening the lid, they made their way down an iron ladder.

"...Can we get to the ruins this way?"

“Yes. We just entered the sewer, the sewers and the ruins are connected.”

“I see. I don’t want to stay in this stench any longer than I have to, so let’s pick up the pace.”

The sewer was damp, and full of a nasty stench. They had to cover their mouths with handkerchiefs as they moved, this did this for over an hour. As they moved, they noticed cracks over all the walls— — they were clearly artificial.

“How did the Heavenly Being’s breathe down here?”

“Well, the Heavenly Being’s created the Bajirikokku Fort to be impregnable— —there are magical words carved into the cracks of the walls, that way oxygen could be created if they were buried alive. They also created a magical barrier above the fort to protect them from water, that way they could prevent flooding. Though occasionally fish do fall through the barrier, the air is also very humid.”

“Hopefully we’ll be able to breathe some of the clean air, once we’re out of this stench.”

They continued traversing the sewers until they arrived at some kind of swamp like environment, it was dark and muddy. There was a lot of vines hanging from the ceiling blocking their path, both of them pushed their way through.

Suddenly — — a bright light appeared before them.

Orphen could feel his feet touching stone, for a moment — — he took in a deep breath, they finally arrived.

Bajirikokku Fort — —

They had just entered Bajirikokku Fort through a route in the underground sewers. The path they took was very large, and about five meters wide. Normally at this end of this path of the sewer you'd find a dead end, unless you know where to look.

“This area is called the *back bone*.”

Stephanie explained.

“Back bone?”

Orphen asked inquisitively, Stephanie nodded.

“That’s what it’s called. The fort was modelled to mimic the biological structure of a certain creature. Different parts of the fort are named after parts of the body. The head, the tail and so on...”

“If you say so, but I don’t really understand what you mean.”

“The head and tail sections are stairways, this is how you enter and leave. If you take the stairway upwards you’ll pass through the barrier and end up at the bottom of the canal.”

After she said that, they could hear someone screaming— —

“Master!”

It was Majic, he came flying through the vines right into Orphen.

“What the hell is wrong with you?”

“Cleo’s been captured!”

“I told you to keep her safe.”

“It’s not my fault, Vulcan arrived with that Golem of his.”

“Figures, we’re heading towards him anyway so nothing’s changed.”

Orphen told Majic to follow them. He then suddenly asked him, pulling a coin out at the same time.

“Majic. Heads or tails, what do you prefer?”

Majic gave him a serious look and replied.

“Tails.”

“I didn’t expect to hear that answer...head’s it is. Steph, which way?”

“Take a right.”

They turned right and went forward. The road ahead went on for a while, it seemed to be curved. Orphen felt like they were going round in circles, he then muttered something.

“What did you say?”

Majic asked. Orphen ignored him and kept moving

forward.

“I’m sure Cleo will forgive you for your misgivings, Orphen.”

Majic said, Orphen cursed inside himself.

“I know.”

Orphen said, sticking out his tongue at the same time.

The group continued to walk until they reached a cloister, Stephanie told them they had reached the *head*. They came across a passage and an opening, looking down it seemed like they were entering a skull. They entered a spiral staircase about 10 meters across— —looking up, they saw a distinct blue light. It was probably the water of the canal.

From time to time, a fish would drop down from above.

“...I guess this is how Vulcan and his megalithic infantry come and go.”

“But how do they climb up the stairs?”



“Look over there.”

Orphen pointed to a pillar, which was in the centre of the spiral stairway.

“They probably climb up that.”

“...That doesn't seem very appropriate.”

“That stupid raccoon dog, everything he does is inappropriate. I remember one time he said he was hungry, he jumped right into the river to catch a frog. Cut it into tiny pieces right on the spot and brewed it, all the while people were watching.

Orphen held on to Stephanie, helping her walk down the stairs.

“Sometimes I wonder why I even decided to follow master.”

“Who knows? Maybe you have a strong bond with your master.”

“.....”

The spiral stairs went on for a while — —if you

looked up you wouldn't be able to see the entrance, now they arrived at the lowest part. The bottom of the stairway was like a dungeon, all covered in brick and with one door. Orphen looked at the door with an inquiring look, he then looked at Stephanie. She nodded and replied.

"From here we can enter the lowermost part of the fort. They're shouldn't be any kind of traps, we're so deep inside that no one would bother."

"Let's hope so."

Orphen said as he held the doors handle.

"...I wonder what's behind door number one."

"This isn't a game, master."

Majic said. Orphen just smiled back at him.

"I wonder who's waiting behind the door, the bastard Vulcan or the Killing Doll."

"...What are you going to do if it's neither?"

"Well, let's find out."

Orphen suddenly turned to doors handle, and stepped through.

Opposite the door was an altar, behind it there was a portrait of a green haired woman. Neatly arranged around the altar was ten megalithic infantry. One of them was holding a figure — —it was Cleo, she was tightly bound by rope. Vulcan stood at a golems feet with an insidious smile, nearby was Dortin who was staying out of sight.

“I’ve been waiting a long time...Orphen.”

That was the first thing Cleo said.

Orphen raised a hand to cover his eyes, he refused to look at her.

“Get me down from here now!”

Cleo shouted. Orphen wasn’t having any of it.

“I didn’t come here for you, I came for that stupid raccoon dog.”

“That goes without saying. But like always, you need to be taught a lesson.”

“.....”

Orphen had to decide what his next move would be, to rescue Cleo or to pummel Vulcan.

“What did you call me, a stupid raccoon dog?”

“Yes.”

Orphen said very clearly. He was trying to restrain himself from doing something stupid.

“I beg you, please save me.”

Cleo cried, meanwhile Orphen and Vulcan glared at each other.

“This is all your fault.”

“Shut up, Cleo. I’ve got to deal with this little bean sprout.”

“I’ll show you how much of a bean sprout I really am!”

Vulcan didn’t realize what he just said, he was only concerned with one thing right now: teaching Orphen a lesson.

“Magical word, bind this fool!”

“Magic? What is this?”

Orphen said, he couldn’t move his body.

“A magical word, obviously. You shouldn’t have kept that message the doll gave you...a magical character was attached to it.”

“Master!”

Majic cried, but Stephanie was oddly calm — —no, she was on the verge of giggling.

“Stephanie?”

Majic said, he was dumbfounded as to why she was going to laugh.

“You men are so useless.”

She said as she walked over to Orphen and reached into his pocket. Orphen looked flustered.

“Don’t worry, I won’t do anything funny.”

Stephanie said, as she pulled the piece of paper out of Orphen’s pocket.

“I withdraw thee, shrew’s dance.”

Orphen was not restricted anymore. Vulcan had a very angry expression.

“It wasn’t meant to happen like this!”

“Hello, damsel in distress here!”

“Playtime is over, forward Megalithic Infantry!”

The golem holding Cleo put her down and charged Orphen, it was about to attack as it raised its arms.

“Master!”

“Orphen!”

Majic and Stephanie shouted, Orphen raised his hand and shouted.

“Sword of Light, whom I do release!”

After a flash and a loud noise, the huge portrait behind them started to fall.

“I see thee, Lady of Chaos!”

A black swirling vortex engulfed the stone giant— —

the gravitational forces utterly destroyed the megalithic infantry. The attack was so fierce that parts of the altar were damaged.

“Tyler! You can do it!”

Orphen didn’t stop in his recklessness destruction, as another golem charged his position.

“In my left hand, the statue of hades!”

“I’m not done yet!”

Vulcan ordered more golems to attack Orphen.

“Sword of Light, whom I do release!”

“Dakada, Monkey 1000. Get him!”

“Ominous starling of death, guiding me!”

A giant shockwave was emitted and the stone giants were shattered into many pieces.

“My ultimate trump card——”

A golem which was slightly bigger than the others began to move. Orphen raised his hand to shout, but ——”

Bang!

Small streaks of lighting filled the room, the megalithic infantry were crumbling—no, they were collapsing inwards. This happened until each remaining golem was turned into a ball of rock.

Then, there was nothing left.

After the dust had settled, Orphen could only see a figure sobbing. It was Cleo, she had her hands buried in her face. Next to her was Dortin and Vulcan, who were both tied up with rope.

“Ah! Someone made her cry!”

Majic said to Orphen, standing behind him.

“Yeah...I can see that.”

Orphen scratched his head, while he watched Cleo.

Majic waved his finger at Orphen and spoke.

“Master, as usual you never learn.”

“But I...”



“No buts. Just listen to her crying.”

Orphen very reluctantly listened to Cleo’s crying. Her voice was intermittently mixed with unknown words.

“I’ll...get...my...revenge...I’ll...pull...his...nails...out...with...a...vice.”

“Now, this is starting to get interesting.

Orphen said.

“Master. If we wait a bit longer I guess we’ll see some real suffering.”

“Just don’t get too close, or else she’ll hurt you too.”

Stephanie whispered.

“I just wish this whole battle was a little more interesting.”

Orphen said, obviously a little unhappy.

“Ahahahahah!”

“Huh?”

Orphen looked towards the altar, the laughter was coming from there and becoming louder.

“...Stop acting so high and mighty!”

Everyone was now looking at the altar— —Vulcan was standing there. They had no idea how he got out of the ropes, Dortin sat beside him.

Standing behind the brothers— —the Killing Doll stood with an elongated needle protruding from its middle finger. It seems the doll cut the rope, but nobody knew when it did it.

Vulcan shook his fur cloak, and pulled out a knife.

“You damn loan shark! Today we will determine a winner!”

“...You still owe me money, asshole. But if you can’t pay it we can always work something out.”

Orphen said, but he no longer focused his attention on Vulcan. All the hairs on his body were standing upright, as the Killing Doll calmly observed him.

(That bastard...)

Orphen said inside himself.

The doll continued to stand behind Vulcan, though it looked like it was using the two brothers as a shield.

(That doll, is it using them as a shield?)

But Vulcan didn't even notice this, he was more concerned with boasting.

“Looks like you lose, now that I've got this doll on my side I'm unstoppable!”

“Well, brother— —”

Dortin interrupted him. Vulcan then proceeded to knock his brother to the ground with his sword.

“It was decided that these ruins were to be the battlefield. Fight the doll! Sorcerer!”

“You don't need to remind me, you little shit. I came to the Bajirikokku Fort knowing full well what would happen.”

Orphen said, then he stuck out his arm.

“Sword of Light, whom I do release!”

A blast of light surged towards the portrait above Vulcan, it burned, then part of it exploded. Debris from the painting made Vulcan scream.

Meanwhile a loud roar echoed throughout the hall, Orphen jumped like a frog. Right after he jumped, a bolt of lightning just stuck his previous position.

“Waha ha ha ha ha!”

Observing Orphen’s antics— —the doll let out an unpleasant laugh. It also retracted the blade back inside its finger, and loudly declared: “During this battle, I’ll also tell you my story.”

“Majic, keep an eye on Cleo.”

Orphen declared. There was nothing stopping him from getting to the altar, overturned wreckage and scattered boulders from the megalithic infantry was littered about the room. The altar was damaged, some of the statues were destroyed. The portrait was beyond repair, the once beautiful face of a woman now gone.

Majic and Stephanie stood motionless by the main entrance, they were both stunned. Cleo's cries could still be heard. Dorton both had his hands on their head, meanwhile Vulcan watched eagerly. There was a look of pleasure on the Killing Doll's face.

At the same time, Orphen had a shocked expression, he was staring at the ceiling — — a strange object was falling to the ground.

“...What...?”

Orphen just looked at it— — it was a metal sphere about 50 cm in diameter, there wasn't any visible markings or even a seam. It was a ball. More balls continued to appear and float in the air— — somehow they started to glow.

Crackling!

Electricity struck at ground in front of Orphen's feet. Orphen was sent straight towards the ground, he started to rapidly chant a mantra.

“Sword of Light, whom I do release!”

He rolled as a blast of light emitted from his hand, heading straight towards the flying balls. It flew straight through them and impacted the ceiling— — it seemed to have no effect.

“That was a direct hit!”

“I can’t believe this.”

It was clear that the Doll was toying with him. Orphen looked at it with anger, but didn’t say anything. He shifted his gaze back towards the floating balls.

(What the hell, that was a direct hit. All I’ve been able to do is let that Doll enjoy himself, but there’s got to be something I can do.) Orphen thought for a moment, he then stood up and ran in the opposite direction— —the metal balls pursed him.

“Ha ha ha! Run all you want, fool!”

Vulcan shouted. Orphen decided to throw an insult at him.

“Shut up, midget!”

“Master!”

It was Majic’s voice. Majic and Stephanie had run to Cleo’s side, both of them picked up the crying girl.

“Orphen, please tell me you have a plan?”

“— —I’m working on it!”

Orphen rushed towards his friends, and jumped right into them, sending them all crashing towards the ground. A moment before, a bright light appeared about Majic’s head. They had just avoided being burnt to a crisp.

“My goodness.”

Majic said. But it wasn’t over yet, Orphen pulled them all up and pointed towards the exit.

“Get the hell out of here!”

“You want us to run away?”

“I can’t do anything with you guys in the way, the doll could always take you as hostages. Now, go!”

He then turned to Cleo.

“That means you too, Cleo. You’ve got to think about your own safety, understand?”

“Orphen...”

Cleo spoke in a low tone. Her hair was a little stringy and tear marks were visible on her face, it was clear she had been through a great ordeal.

“Master.”

Majic spoke next.

“Does that mean you care about my safety too?”

“You’ve got a big mouth, you know that?”

“I’ll take that as a no.”

“Knock it off. Listen, Stephanie will take you back the way we came. Now move it!”

Orphen said as he pushed Majic. The trio were about to leave when — —

A pillar of fire appeared in front of Majic, the doll was now smiling. On its right elbow there was magical flashing text.



“Did you think I’d let you go?”

Looking at the fire, Majic was scared. Stephanie was trying to keep Cleo calm, meanwhile Orphen was thinking of what to do next.

“It’s useless Orphen, you can’t win.”

“Leave me alone.”

Orphen now faced the altar.

“You said you wanted to tell me you’re story, it doesn’t matter anymore. I understand.”

“Understand what?”

The Killing Doll’s stared coldly. Orphen lifted up his head and smiled.

“Steph said that she made a mistake by waking you up, I found this very strange.”

“Oh...”

“Steph could not have woke you up. For hundreds of years ago, the Heavenly Beings created you.”

“...Orphen?”

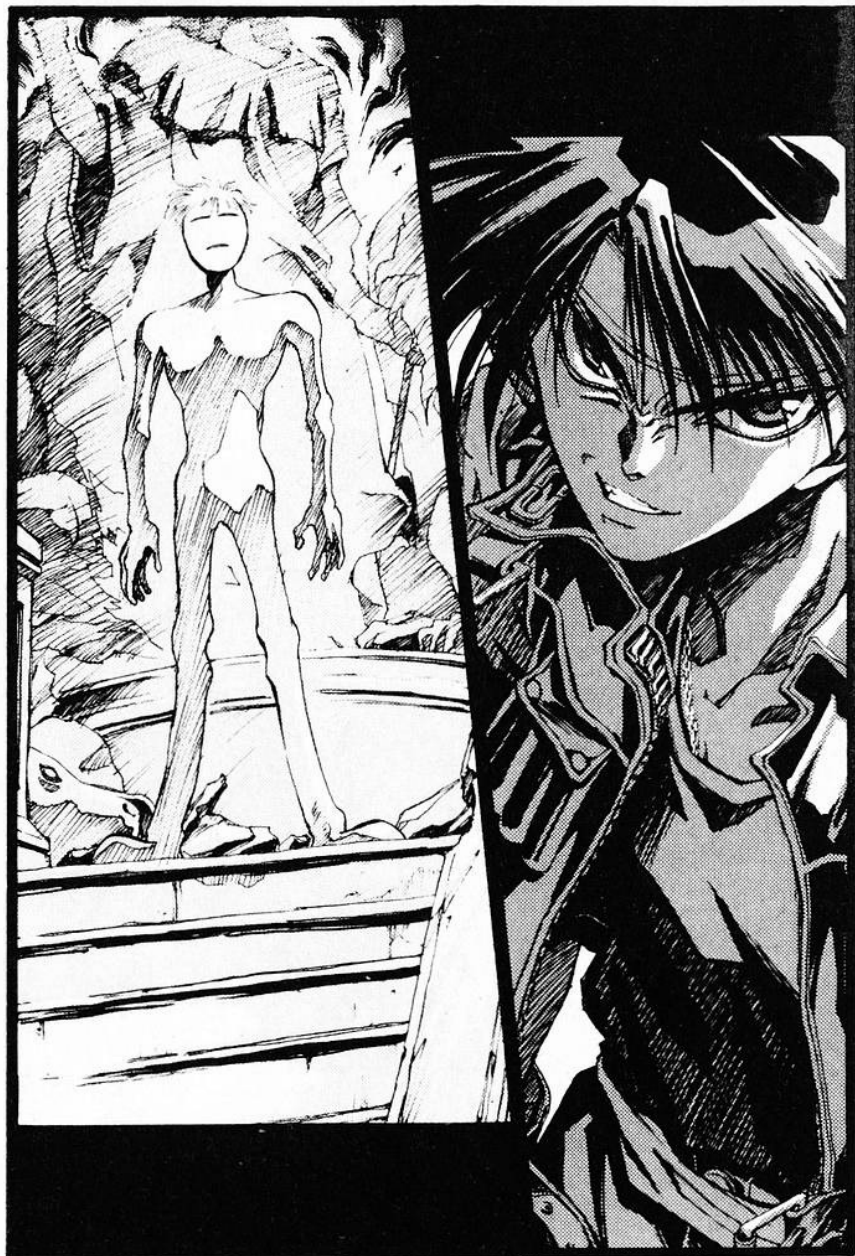
Stephanie asked, obviously puzzled. Orphen then pulled a pendant out from under his shirt.

“Reading magical characters is a tricky business, not everyone can do it. It’s unbelievably hard work, even for those from the *Tower of Fang*. Steph, I don’t mean to belittle you — —but it isn’t possible for you to use those magical words. Let alone awaken a Killing Doll, using the Heavenly Beings magic isn’t so simple.”

“However— —”

Stephanie said as they looked towards the Killing Doll, it had begun to laugh loudly.

“What are you talking about, human sorcerer?”



“I don’t think she awoke you, it must have been preordained.”

“Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!”

The Killing Doll started laughing uncontrollably, as he stumbled backwards.

“Oh, my master! You fool! You miscalculated! You miscalculated!”

He then waved towards Orphen.

“My master— —”

He then put his hand on his head.

“We were supposed to wait two hundred years! He miscalculated it! Aren’t you supposed to be gods?!”

“...What the hell is going on?”

Stephanie asked. Orphen shook his head, and wiped his brow.

“Isn’t it obvious?”

“...I guess so.”

And suddenly the Doll stopped laughing.

“I’ll tell you something. A thousand years ago, when the Heavenly Beings were powerful. The battle of Bajirikokku Fort happened, and they won, or so the legend says.”

The Doll waved its arm mockingly.

“The legend is wrong, they failed! The walled city was completely destroyed, and the fort was lost.”

The doll then shrugged its shoulders.

“They all died from exposure to Bajirikokku’s poison. After the long battle, those who were left all waited to die as their bodies were eroded by the poison.”

“If that’s the case...they were still regarded as demigods. Even if the poison had a severe effect on them, it would take a while for them to die.”

“That is true. But during that time they built canals and then the city, the humans came to the city and the two races became one.”

“And this resulted in a mixed race, humans that could use magic.”

“But nevertheless, I feel betrayed.”

Majic quietly crept up behind Orphen.

“Who betrayed him, master?”

“The answer is simple.”

The Doll’s lips were like a crescent moon as it smiled.

“Everyone betrayed each other.”

“...How so?”

Orphen asked.

“The Heavenly Beings were corrupted. The Heavenly Beings could survive for a while with the poison, but it was deadly to humans. The humans they came in contact with died one after another, and naturally the humans began to feel wary. The humans thought the Heavenly Beings wanted to obliterate mankind. The Heavenly Beings were

jealous that the humans were increasing in numbers and gaining the powers of sorcery. Meanwhile the Heavenly Beings were low in number, and had a very low birth rate.”

“...As a result...”

“Yes. The time of the Sorcerer hunting began, and the Killing Dolls were created.”

“.....”

The room went quiet. Then as if the Dolls mood changed, it raised its voice.

“Everyone betrayed each other because they didn’t trust each other!”

“...Listen to yourself, you already know who betrayed who.”

“We didn’t betray anyone, because we remained calm. At that time, our orders were to eliminate human sorcerers. Nothing more, nothing less.”

“Then why did the Heavenly Beings disappear?”

Majic asked, almost shouting. Then the dolls eyes opened wide, as he replied.

“Poison, their downfall was ensured by that damn poison. But Sister Isutashiba, she *wanted to leave proof that they existed.*”

The Doll raised its finger, and pointed towards the burnt portrait.

“She was a strong woman— —she gave us an ultimatum. She wanted us to wipe out all mages in this city, but leave the normal humans alone. She also commanded that hundreds of other Killing Dolls were to be secretly hidden throughout the continent, waiting to commence their final command.”

“Is that so?”

Orphen paid attention to the ceiling and the floating metal balls, he looked at Stephanie, and she then spoke.

“It’s the truth. There are a lot of coffins stored in the



Bajirikokku Fort, inside there are — —”

Orphen spotted a metal ball crackling, and immediately shouted.

“Sword of Light, whom I do release!”

A torrent of light spun through the air, Orphen’s attack impacted the ball just as it was about to attack. The metal ball exploded into a million pieces.

While avoiding the metal fragments, Orphen spoke to the Doll.

“So that’s it. You blow them up, just as they are about to attack. Seems like you’re little balls can’t handle that much energy.”

“Brother... Brother.”

Dortin had been listening up until now, and he spoke with fear in his voice.

“This is getting serious, let’s get out of here.”

“You should be ashamed!”

Dortin didn’t notice it, but Vulcan had sprinted over

and hid behind Orphen. Vulcan flew into a rage as he waved his fist at his brother.

“I never once thought that my own flesh and blood would betray me!”

“Why you little — —”

“Orphen, you’ve got to save my brother.”

“Oh...”

Orphen sounded bored, and he kicked Vulcan to make him be quiet.

“Okay, enough of this hostage crap. I agreed to come so let him go.”

Dortin walked over carefully, Orphen watched him and the Killing Doll carefully — —hundreds of characters started to appear all over its body.

Orphen knew he wouldn’t win in a straight up fight, so he’d have to fight tactically.

“Are you really a doll?”

“...What?”

The Doll said, as its eyes twitched.

A thin smile appeared on Orphen's face, he wanted to draw the enemy's attention.

“Can't you turn a blind eye to this situation?”

“I can only follow the mission.”

“Yes. But— —”

Orphen's gaze moved from the Doll to one of the statues behind it.

“You're so careless, don't you pay attention to your surroundings?”

“What do you mean?”

The Killing Doll quickly analysed what Orphen was looking at, but it was too late— —

From one of the statues, a blonde girl jumped at the Doll with a sword in one hand.

“You— —”

The Doll tried to outstretch its fingers, but it was too late— —Cleo brought the sword down upon the

Killing Doll, cutting from its neck to its lower abdomen. Although no blood was spilled, the Doll looked badly damaged.

“The — — pain!”

Cleo’s feet touched the ground, and screamed as she charged the Doll. Its eyes were now filled with anger, it raised its arms to protect itself.

“...You filthy bitch! How dare you attack me!”

“Sword of Light, whom I do release!”

Orphen lifted his arm and a blast of light flew towards the Killing Doll.

“Ahhhhhhh!”

The explosions made the Doll stagger but it sent Cleo to the ground, the Doll then retreated to the side of the altar. Orphen jumped up onto the altar and picked up the fallen Cleo, and whispered.

“You did a good job, partner.”

Cleo raised her face to look at him.

“Partner?”

She pondered on the word, with a look of surprise on her face.

And then— —

Bang!

A white radiance of light was being emitted from the Doll’s current location, accompanied by a wave of intense heat and wind it pushed Orphen and Cleo from the altar.

Orphen stood up— —

Looking upwards at the altar, Orphen was filled with terror. The Doll stood on the altar, apart from its injury, it looked relatively intact. Its cold eyes now looked down upon Orphen and Cleo.

“You dare attack me?”

“You started it.”

Orphen stood up, and outstretch his arms to protect Cleo. He smiled and spoke.

“But don’t worry, next time we’ll get rid of those snazzy characters you’ve got all over your body.”

“You won’t get them all. In order to eliminate sorcerers, we were given hundreds of characters. And— —”

Orphen interrupted the Doll and spoke.

“Even if you have hundreds, losing even one means that you lose power. Playtime is over, you must be destroyed!”

He then reached into his chest, and pulled out a pendant— —a dragon wrapped around a sword.

“You are just a third rate doll! Bring it on!”

“As you wish.”

The Doll cried, and moved its fingers towards its right shoulder. He pressed down and a magical character started to glow— —numerous arrows of light were sent towards Orphen.

“Spin around me, Armour of light!”

Orphen chanted the incantation, everyone around him was enveloped in a wall of light. But some of the arrows of light pierced through the barrier and struck the ground.

“ — — ! ”

It appeared Orphen had been injured by the resulting explosion, he was lucky that the arrow didn't hit him directly. He then looked around hastily, to confirm his companion's condition.

— — He was stunned.

The entire room was in a mess. Pieces of the floor were all over the room, there was water everywhere. There was a giant hole in the ceiling where water was pouring through, they would even see the sky. The entire altar was destroyed, save for the statue of a Heavenly Being that was deliberately saved during the attack. The walls of the room were cracked, and water was seeping through.

Endless particles of dust filled the room so that Orphen couldn't see. Cleo and Majic were most

likely buried under some rubble.

“Bastard!”

Orphen shouted, he was going to look for his companions— —but he couldn’t move his leg, it was numb.

“Oh, come on.”

“Does it hurt?”

The Doll’s cruel voice floated around the room. He then quietly approached Orphen from the rear, his skinny fingers extending to pinch Orphen’s neck.

(I can’t move...)

Orphen said inside himself. The Doll then spoke.

“This won’t hurt a bit. The drug will take effect rather quickly, then you will be rendered inert. It’s quite an innovative drug, wouldn’t you say? Once you’re mind has been cleansed, I will take away you’re humanity.”

“ ..... ”



“Don’t expect that little girl to help you this time, for she is at my feet.... unconscious.”

Orphen desperately tried to look through the dust, but to no avail. Meanwhile, the Doll continued to talk.

“If you’re wondering about that other black sorcerer, it’s useless. To save you the effort, I’ll tell you where she is. She’s currently at the altar, buried under rubble.”

“.....”

“How sad, how tragic. But what about your student?”

“.....”

“Majic! Can you hear me?”

Behind him came the Doll’s sarcastic voice. But Orphen ignored it, and tried talking to Majic.

“To defeat this third rate doll I need your strength. Listen, you should be able to use your magic.”

Orphen listened for an answer, a bead of sweat fell from his forehead.

“I’ll teach you the basic methods of casting magic. Listen...you’ve got to keep your eye on the target. Focus on the target and clear your mind, the breath. Breath slowly so that you’re body becomes relaxed. The more you breath, the stronger you’re attack becomes.”

There was no response.

(Did he hear me?)

Orphen was getting desperate.

“If you’ve done that, then you’re ready. Those vocal exercise better have paid off, use that light attack just like I showed you.”

For a moment, tension filled the air.

“Sword of Light— —”

“...Huh?”

Both Orphen and the Killing Doll turned around.

“ — — whom I do release!”

Orphen couldn't believe his eyes, a huge ball of light and heat was sent in his direction. It flew past the Killing Doll burning it, and hit the walls of the hall. It easily penetrated the wall, shaking the entire Bajirikokku Fort.

“This guy...?”

The Doll was shaken, but ready to fight.

“So much power...”



When the ball of light and heat dissipated, water poured through the open hole.

The Doll now seemed to relax his body — — Orphen seized this opportunity to take the needle out of his neck, pulling off the dolls finger caused him some pain.

(Get your hand off me, creep!)

At the same time, Orphen ordered his body to pick up Cleo's sword at his feet. He swung the sword towards the Doll's neck and got stuck halfway through cutting off its head. Orphen then let go of the sword and began chanting an incantation.

“Sword of the Descending Demon, that I doth carry!”

In Orphen's hand, a humming noise could be heard, as if there was an invisible sword, it began to increase in weight. Orphen starred at the sword stuck in the Doll's neck, he then brought the invisible sword up to the left side of the Dolls neck and slashed.

He kept slashing and stabbing until his sword touched that of Cleo's, and then with one last swing the Doll's head went flying through the air.

The Doll's head flew for a couple of meters, and landed in a mountain of rubble, then it rolled to the ground. It continued to roll until it stopped right in front of the Heavenly Being statue.

“.....”

Orphen watched the entire thing, meanwhile he was unconsciously stroking Cleo's blonder hair.

“It's over...”

Whack!

The Doll's body slammed against the ground, Orphen wore a weary smile. He then looked at the giant hole which Majic created with his attack, water was pouring through, the entire room would be flooded within ten minutes.

(That guy...he was quite the challenge, yet he wasn't even human.)

“M-M-M-Master!”

Majic shouted.

“How did you do that?”

As Majic approached Orphen, he saw that he didn’t look happy.

“Well, I just— —”

“You moron!”

Orphen suddenly got angry, and threw some rubble at Majic.

“What was that for?”

“You tell me, look at your hands!”

Listening to Orphen, Majic looked at his hands with a puzzled expression.

“My hands! They’re burnt!”

“You hurt yourself with that spell, which tells me that you didn’t aim properly when you attacked! Moreover, you missed the doll too!”

“I didn’t know if I would succeed.”

“Damn it, didn’t you listen to my instructions?”

The others including Stephanie began to wake up — — she mumbled, then stood up out of the rubble. Near the entrance, they could see Dortin and Vulcan. Cleo said a few words as she rolled over in her sleep.

“Oh...is it over, Orphen?”

Stephanie said as she approached, Orphen was about to respond but — —

“Ahahahaha!”

A burst of laughter interrupted him — —

At the statue of the Heavenly Being, the Doll’s head laughed aloud for a while, then it spoke.

“Do you think it’s over?! After I stop functioning, another doll will wake up and take my place! I have a thousand compatriots, do you really think you can take them on?!”



“.....”

Orphen silently stood up.

“What will you do?”

Orphen didn't answer. He went straight towards the body of the Killing Doll, and lifted it into the air.

Orphen then looked towards Dortin and Vulcan and asked them a question.

“Did any of you guys see him destroy the Alliance of Sorcerers building?”

“Well, I— —”

“By the way, I fainted.”

Vulcan said in a rather proud tone, Orphen had to smash a piece of rubble to silence him. Orphen asked Dortin again.

“Did you see where the Doll wrote the magical character?”

“I remember...”

“You bastard!”

The Doll screamed.

“Shut up! Don’t speak out of turn. If we can draw the character again with the Doll’s fingers, then we’ll be able to reproduce the effect.”

Dortin showed Orphen how to draw the character, then suddenly — — explosions and tornados started to go off all around them. The first of escape was Vulcan and Dortin, followed by Majic and Cleo, Orphen was ready to go but someone grabbed him from behind.

“...Steph.”

Orphen looked at her, with a puzzled expression.

“What’s wrong?”

“...I want to ask you something. After listening to the Doll’s words, don’t you feel anything?”

“What did he say?”

“Don’t you remember? Those things he said about the Heavenly Beings. If it’s true, the persecution of sorcerers in this city all happened because of a

misunderstanding— —”

There were tears in Stephanie’s eyes, Orphen just shrugged.

“Well, there’s nothing we can do about that.”

He then looked back towards the Doll’s head, and the now flooding room.

“I wouldn’t believe anything that bastard said, you’d never know if he was telling the truth or not.”

“But, do you believe him?”

“Assuming that the Heavenly Beings were being eroded by the poison, it was probably also infectious. Then it’s possible that the half breeds created from the union of regular humans and the Heavenly Beings also inherited the poison. If this is true, then perhaps a large percentage if not all humans are infected with the Bajirikokku fort poison. If left unchecked, this could be the downfall of humanity as we know it. In order to avoid this outcome, a purge may be needed.”

“So, Sister Isutashiba was dying and she ordered the Doll’s to kill the sorcerers. Knowing full well that other humans may be infected?”

“She must have had her reasons. Anyway, we can be thankful that the Dolls didn’t carry out their mission. For if they did, we wouldn’t be here to talk about it.”

Orphen then motioned for her to go forward, he was about to leave too but he turned around— —and looked at the now burnt portrait of Sister Isutashiba.

“All’s well that ends well.”

Orphen smiled and looked the Doll’s head, now half submerged in water. It was tilted upwards, looking at the statue of a Heavenly Being, a statue of Sister Isutashiba.”

“Anyway, there’s no evidence to say that all the Heavenly Beings were killed. For all we know, they are walking among us today. Though let’s hope that we won’t have any more misunderstandings.”

The Bajirikokku fort now started to shake violently, Orphen and the group quickly left the place.

# Epilogue

“...I knew the reunion was a mess from the very beginning— —I thought about it, I thought we would have a calm conversion just like all those years ago.”

Orphen said as he put his elbows on the table.

Stephanie was sitting opposite of him, with half a smile, she then picked up a small cup and took a sip.

“Three years ago I was lying on that bed.”

She said as she smiled, Orphen smiled somewhat unnaturally— —he thought about some bad memories.

They were in Alenhatan City’s central street, there were lots of students walking the street— —students from all over the continent come here just for this café. Both of them came for the same reason, Orphen sat idly sipping something.

Orphen coughed— —or rather pretended to cough.

Looking back on his attitude, he began to talk.

“You know, when I first arrived here...I thought about you.”

“Really? That pleases me.”

“Well...I don’t deserve such pleasure. For a while, my current business venture hasn’t been doing too well...”

“I see.”

“But now, I feel like I’m better than what I once was — —”

Orphen really didn’t know how to express himself, Stephanie put her cup on the table.

“If I run into any trouble, can I find you again?”

“Well...yeah.”

Orphen answered in a very vague manner. He saw Stephanie’s eyes flicker for a moment, then she said:

“That young girl... Cleo, what did you say to her?”

“Huh?”

Orphen didn't know how to answer. A sinister smile appeared on Stephanie's face.

"She asked could she cry on my shoulder, what did you say to her? — — Are you, in love with her?"

"Whoa..."

Orphen panicked.

"Cat got your tongue?"

Stephanie giggled for a while.

"Anyway, Cleo said you seemed sick. I could take you to a doctor, just like old times..."

"I'm alright, it's not that painful."

Stephanie said, showing her chest as proof.

"Since then, I've been reborn...I am enjoying my new life"

"A new beginning."

Orphen said with a satirical voice — — he then lowered his voice as he spoke.



“I always thought it was funny that when the doctor was fixing you’re face, he gave you the face of a woman instead of a man.”

“Excuse me!”

Stephanie’s face became contorted as she flipped the table.

“It wasn’t an accident, I wanted this! And he didn’t just fix my face, he also helped me get a pair of rubber breasts, some cream to make my skin more ladylike, remove my facial hair, and so on. That way I became more like a real woman— —”

“Calm down! I know you’ve changed a lot in three years, Stephen.”

“And don’t you forget it!”

“Cleo also said that after you’re transformation you’re magical powers significantly weakened, is that true?”

“What transformation? I was reborn!”

Both of them stared at each other for a while, then

Orphen fixed the table and sat back down on his chair. He picked up the empty cup with trembling hands, and held it until he calmed down.

“Anyway...it’s a thing of the past.”

“.....”

Stephanie also calmed down, fixed her hair and then sat down. Orphen stared at his cup, watching her in the cups reflection.

“So, what are you going to do next?”

“Is that a joke? The Alliance of Sorcerers in Alenhatan City is no more, I’m obviously going home.”

“Home?”

“To the south — — to my apartment.”

“...What about your parents, have you been in contact?”

“I don’t want to talk about that. Anyway, what are your plans?”

“Tomorrow, we head north.”

“North?”

“Yeah. Those two damn trolls didn’t pay me back the money they owed me, they fled north.”

Then he got up from his chair.

“By the way, Cleo should be feeling better now. She spent some time in the Inn’s café cooking supper, she also did some babysitting if you don’t believe it. Anyway, I hope we meet again...farewell, Steph.”

Both of them exchanged their goodbyes and waved at each other.

Stephanie didn’t say anything, she just stared at her empty cup.

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“Hey, the food is ready.”

“Ah— —okay.”

Cleo looked very happy as she brought a tray over to Orphen, some type of cheesecake seemed to be on the plate.

“I originally wanted to make something better for you to eat, but the old man downstairs was reluctant to let me cook. So, this will have to do.”

“Oh, I’m sorry — — for arriving late.”

Orphen said to her in an apologetic tone.

“And I’m sorry for last night, I wasn’t thinking straight and I let you get captured.”

“Don’t worry, it’s all over now.”

Cleo said dismissively.

Orphen felt like he was doing something wrong, something very wrong. He took a fork and the cheesecake.

“You know, next time let’s do something safer. Starting tomorrow we’ll do some sightseeing, I know a couple of places which are worth seeing, you interested?”

Orphen tried to talk about other things while he cut a slice of the cheesecake and put it into his mouth. He bit down, his eyes widened. But it wasn't the food that made him do so, it was Cleo's reaction.

“Cleo...”

Orphen watched her uncomfortably as her hands started to shake.

“I'm going to savour this, you're punishment that is...you're sweet punishment.”

A devilish grin appeared on Cleo's face.

“Soap, don't waste it now.”

He then looked towards Majic, his apprentice was sticking his tongue of his mouth at him. It seems he wasn't the only guinea pig in this experiment.

“Cleo...what have you done?”

Orphen's voice trembled, but the girl was even happier now.

“You can wash your underwear and socks in the

bathtub. I've already picked out an outfit for you, so you better wear it. And don't forget to pay back the money for the clothes...here is the receipt."

"Is that why you are so happy? Did you..."

Orphen said in a miserable tone. The soap in his mouth was giving him a headache, his hands began to shake.

Cleo still looked at him, with that same happy smile. Orphen tried to wonder the motivation behind her smile, but he thought nothing of it. He then ate the rest of the soap filled cheesecake, knowing nothing of what Cleo had in store for him.

# References and Translation Notes

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